THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

JANUARY

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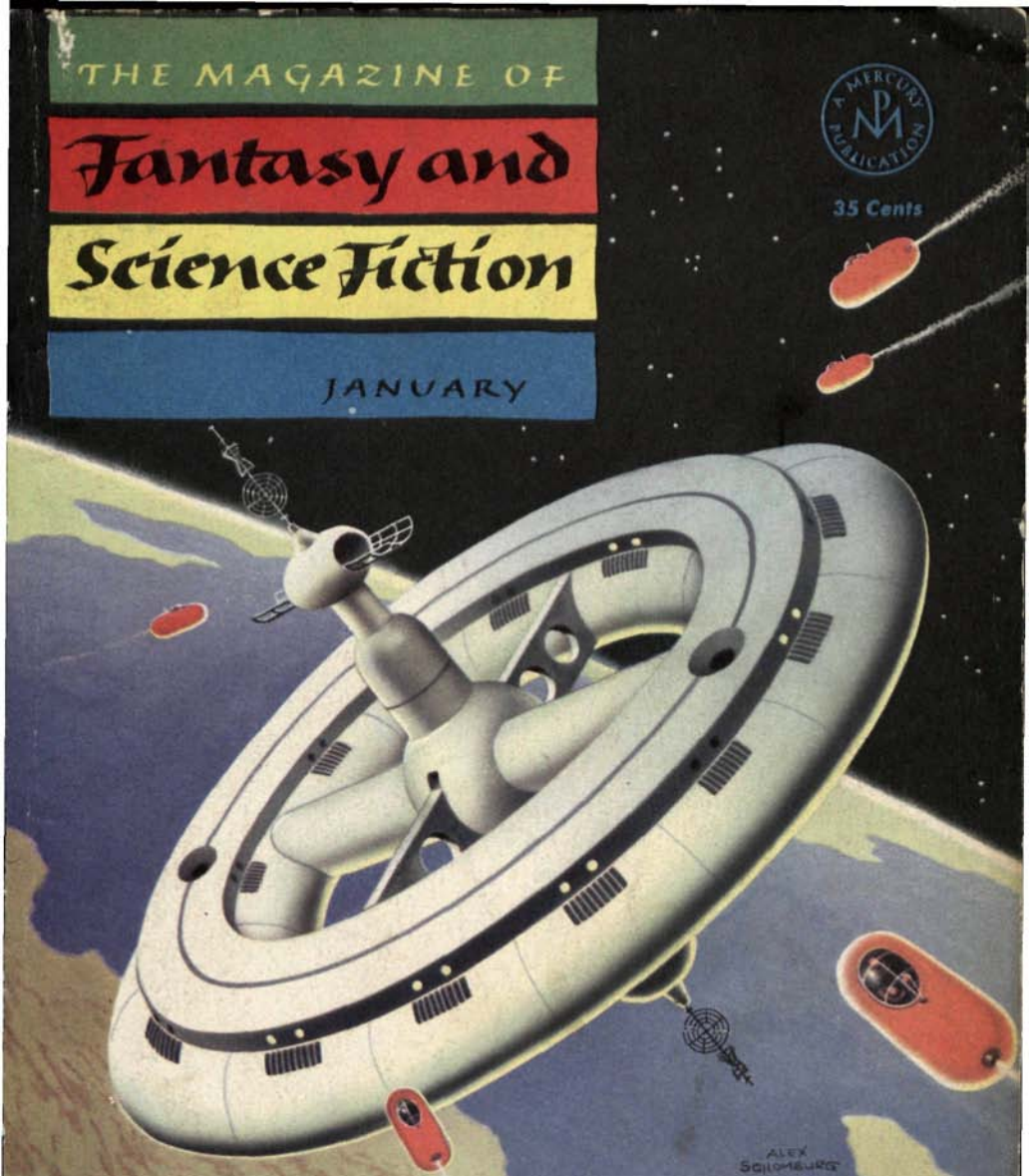

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The Footprint	MABEL SEELEY
The Perfect Creature	JOHN WYNDHAM
The New Ritual	IDRIS SEABRIGHT
The Isle of Voices	ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

A selection of the best stories of fantasy and science fiction, new and old

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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(Earth's artificial satellite)

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Modern writers have presented us with some pretty grim pictures of the future world — occasionally, as with Huxley, Orwell or Bradbury, as predictions of the dire trends of our civilization; occasionally (naming no names) as pictures of what the author, God help his soul, considers the desirable future of the super-race of which he is a precursor. But the future need not (let us pray, shall *not) be as stern as these depictions. To honor the joyous mood of this holiday season, we present the finest conception we have yet seen of the pure* fun *of the future — a Breughel-like canvas of merriment which fuses all holidays into a gay brilliance like the sparkle of July's fireworks reflected in the crisp snows of December.*

The Big Holiday

by FRITZ LEIBER

THE WHISTLES blew. A thousand hands switched off pocket radios and wall-size television screens, right in the middle of the Martian newscast. Another 500 all around the town locked the motors of sky scooters and ground buggies. A dozen cash registers rang up lucky last sales and were silent, locked. Two thousand throats breathed a sigh of relief. Two thousand hearts began to warm.

The whistles blew. Mrs. Pullen slammed a last batch of cookies into the electronic oven, counted to ten, switched it off, wiped her face, and stood there beaming at the fragrant towers of her handiwork — a gray-haired princess in a cookie castle. Mrs. Goldfarb smiled at her brown and cream-flecked woodpiles of blintzes. Mr. Gianelli, his eyes watering with heat and spices, admired his steaming log-jams of Italian sausage. Widowed Mr. Tomlinson was contemplating his bowls of hard-boiled eggs when a goddess shot him in the back with a silver arrow. He turned around and commented, "That tunic is a bit daring, pet." His daughter, new to grown-up life as a pussy willow, waved her plastic bow and said, "I'm going as Diana." Mr. Tomlinson mused, "Ah, the fleet-footed huntress."

The whistles blew. Mr. Jingles, so called by the children for the silver coins he always carried, emptied his pockets of them, added his green money, put it all away in the top drawer of his dresser. Everywhere else in the town billfolds and purses disappeared. Offices closed. Secretaries sprayed their noses with powder and fluttered into their cloudlike electrosilk coats.

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Mr. Debevois tore a May-something 2077 date-sheet off his desk calendar, made a paper dart of it, and shot it at his lagging stenographer, who was stooping to return a folder of microfilm to a bottom file drawer. Storekeepers took off their aprons and walked out, leaving doors unlocked. Plump Mr. Wilson pressed a button and a sign appeared on the movie-house marquee: NO SHOW TONIGHT. Beardy Mr. Goldfarb shrugged, smiled, put away a sheaf of teleflashed stock reports, unbuttoned a great big drawer and took out a great big parchment scroll. School children tore off across the soft sandy schoolyard and green lawns slippery with sunlight. Down at the little aluminum station the atomic train inched to a stop like a golden caterpillar and the engineer jumped out in his best clothes.

The whistles blew. Mr. Moriarty, the town mortician, with black-clad limbs thin as a spider's and hat tall as Abraham Lincoln's, looked around at the bare gleaming tables and rubbed his hands. He opened a big thick icebox door and looked into two coffins. "They'll keep," he said. He opened another and looked at the empty shelves and nodded. "In case anybody has the bad luck to die the next three days," he said. Then the spiderweb of wrinkles all over his face contracted in a smile. He said softly, "Or maybe that would be the nicest time of year to go."

The whistles stopped. From back of the firehouse, around the lovely new red-vaned fire-copter, twenty pairs of strong hands pushed an old-fashioned automobile, a convertible, black and fat as sin, armored with chromium and sprouting three antennae — for radio, phone, and television. They shoved it across the street with a shout and it jounced to rest in front of the courthouse, its antennae quivering.

While toward the courthouse square, down the leaf-bowered streets silent of traffic, 4,000 big and little feet came pounding.

In the empty schoolhouse, before the mirror in the girls' room, Miss Kidd decided that her inch-long eyelashes were securely attached. She painted herself sultry lips, then almost ruined them making anguished faces as she tugged at the girdle borrowed from the museum. Pausing to catch her breath, she leafed with morbid curiosity through the pile of themes her class had turned in. They were all titled "The Big Holiday." The first one began:

By some it is thot that the Big Holiday started with the merrimaking of the Pre-lentin festeval at Reo D. Janero . . .

She hastily turned to the next.

In the olden times of the 20th Century, people didnt injoy holidays

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very much. They worred too much about making money and buying and selling. They even tried to sell each other, like in the very faroff times of slavery. . . .

(Beside this, Miss Kidd had red-penciled, "*Sell* a person *on* something. Old idiom. Means to persuade to buy, or convince of worth; has nothing to do with slavery.")

Resisting further temptation, Miss Kidd turned the themes face down and got back to work. She pinned together the plunging neckline of her antique cocktail dress, hesitated, then recklessly unpinned it. She put on a weird picture hat about three feet across, tossed a mink fur around her shoulders. "The fourth grade will have things to say about you," she told her reflection and hobbled out on unfamiliar French heels.

In the barber shop Mr. Felton, the town drunkard, lifted incredulous fingers to his fresh-shaven, lotioned cheeks. He watched the mirror with a beery wonder as they clad him in silk shirt, stiff collar, and a pin-striped suit. He gaped with delight as they draped a huge gold watch-chain across his paunch and speared his tie with a blinding diamond pin. Mr. Kantarian, the barber, stood back, walked around, and curtly nodded his approval.

Mr. Wilson stepped into a money bag with arms and legs, tightened the drawstring around his neck, and put on a golden crown. A thought struck him and he got out his pocketbook. "It isn't breaking a holiday rule," he reassured himself, "if I use the junk as a stage property." And he artistically stuffed twenty or thirty dollar bills into his neckband. Then he walked out of his movie house.

The square was already a-chatter and a-swirl with the town's two thousand. Mr. Wilson, conscious of the dignity of his role, ignored the attention he attracted. At the firehouse corner he was joined by Miss Kidd and Mr. Felton. The drunkard eyed the crowd, then stiffened his back. With ritualistic solemnity the three walked to the fat black convertible. There they were met by Mr. Moriarty, whose spider-webbed face was set in the gloomiest lines. He tipped his stovepipe hat and opened the rear door for Miss Kidd and Mr. Felton, then got in front beside Mr. Wilson, who had taken the wheel.

There was a shot and a puff of smoke. A figure in track pants and shirt emblazoned with golden bolts of lightning took off from across the square. He sped like the wind, the propellor of his beanie making a golden glory over his bent head. A goddess with a plastic bow gave an excited little yip. Mr. Tomlinson lifted a comprehending brow and remarked to her, "Jim Kelly, pet? So that's why you need to be fleet-footed."

"He's awfully shy too," she told him frankly.

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Meanwhile the speedy topic of their conversation had sprung up on the back of the seat behind Mr. Wilson and begun pounding him on his money-green ruff and pointing frantically to the big old alarm clock strapped to his own wrist.

A dark man beat on a drum. Things got quiet. Mr. Goldfarb unrolled his parchment, cleared his throat, directed a severe stare at the occupants of the black car, and recited loudly, "Hear ye! Hear ye! Know all men here present that for the good of our hearts and minds and souls the following creatures are banished from town.

"First," he said, eyeing Mr. Wilson, "Money! Because he's a tyrant, a very Midas who turns the moon to two bits and the green grass to dingy green paper.

"Second," (Mr.Felton beamed as the stern gaze turned his way). "Success! Because he goes around with the wrong sort of people — I mean the gentleman I referred to first and the lady I'm referring to next." He looked at Miss Kidd. "Glamour! Because she's a huzzy who doesn't play fair. We like girls too much to let them be used to help sell soft drinks.

"And finally," he went on, turning to Jim Kelly and Mr. Moriarty, "Hurry and Worry! The one because while he's a good boy on a trip to Mars or the doctor, he's too hard on our hearts. The other — Worry — because he aids and abets all four aforementioned."

Mr. Jingles stepped up and began to tootle the funeral march, while dark Mr. Ambrose rumbled his drums ever so softly.

Mr. Goldfarb concluded, "These five are directed to leave town at once without pause or prayer. If they — or any of their equally guilty accomplices, such as Work, War, and Glory — should venture within the town limits during the next three days, we will violate the Constitution and visit upon them various cruel and unusual punishments."

He rolled up the parchment, folded his arms, stuck out his beard, and said, "Now, get!"

Mr. Wilson stamped on the starter. The exhaust puffed nose-wrinkling blue smoke. The fat black car moved forward ponderously. Ahead the bright-clad people lined up on either side, like rows of flowers.

"Goodby," they called.

They waved at Mr. Wilson. "Goodby, Money." He stared solemnly ahead, intent on steering.

"Goodby, Success," they called to Mr. Felton. Forgetting character, he waved happily back.

"Goodby, Glamour," they called to Miss Kidd. She smiled at them scornfully, threw back her shoulders, looked down her plunging neckline, gathered her courage and held her position.

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"Goodby, Hurry. Goodby, Worry," they called to Jim Kelly and Mr. Moriarty. The latter creased his brow and shook his head doomfully. The sprinter-wildly pleaded with Wilson for more speed.

The car passed between Mason's Hardware and the town's sole sky-scraper, a ten-story glastic skylon. Buckets of black confetti filled the air, snowed on the car, peppered Miss Kidd with beauty spots. Black paper streamers unrolled lazily downward, snagged chromium grills, dragged behind like a black fringe.

Moving majestically always, the car reached the schoolyard with its new-gathered ranks of children. A line of third and fourth grade boys raised cap pistols and solemnly discharged them. "Goodby, Hurry. Goodby, Worry." A few fourth graders called, "Goodby, Miss Kidd," and some added, "Goodby, themes," but their voices were lost.

One boy, greatly daring, darted in front of the car, planted two suction-cupped black plumes on the hood, and skipped away. They waved like black banderillas in the shoulders of a sluggish black bull.

"Goodby, Money. Goodby, Success. Goodby, Glamour.

"Goodby, goodby, goodby."

A half mile out of town, just beyond the flower-gay cemetery, Mr. Wilson parked the fat black car. They all got out and took suitcases from the trunk compartment, changed to regular holiday clothes and strolled back to join the fun, half listening to a bibulous harangue by Mr. Felton on the pros and cons of the Big Holiday.

"Who's your girl friend this time?" Miss Kidd asked Jim Kelly with teacher-like camaraderie, but he blushed and sidled away without answering.

Two blocks off they could hear Mr. Pullen, the banker, sawing on his fiddle. Right in the dappling shade in front of the courthouse. Mr. Jingles was twittering his flute. Dark Mr. Ambrose was making his drums talk gay. The whole village band was turning its happiness to sound. Around, streams of women were piling tables high. Suddenly there was a rush to the west side of the square. Up Main Street, swept speckless for dancing, creaked a museum carriage, pulled like a rickshaw by half the eighth grade boys. Out of it jumped Mr. Ferguson, the butcher, dressed in a domino, face red with glee. He lifted down a girl dressed in white like a nymph or a bride. Seeing her in the insurance office, you'd never have guessed that Miss Wolzynski could look so pretty.

"Welcome, Friendship! Welcome, Love!"

Up from the back of the carriage, yawning and arm-stretching, rose tall Mr. Gutknecht, teacher and town historian, dressed like an oldtime farmer, with hay in his hair.

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"Welcome, Laziness!"

Clang! Up popped a magnesium manhole cover and out shot Joe Turner, the town policeman, dressed in motley with a bladder on a stick.

"Welcome, Fun!"

Fun chased Mr. Ferguson, chased Miss Wolzynski, chased Mr. Gutknecht, who wouldn't be chased and only yawned as the bladder bounced off his back.

BZZ-bzz. A silver ambulance-copter droned over the square. Down snowed bushels of flowers. Down came a silken line. And down that, on a flower-decked parachute in a flower-decked dress, came Jenny, waitress at the Skylon Cafe. Her hair was so full of flowers you'd need to have seen her before to know it was corn-colored.

"Welcome, Joy!"

Mr. Goldfarb smiled at everything, wiped his forehead and his neck under his beard, and wrapped comradely fingers around a lapel of Mr. Wilson, who had just got back.

"Say," he said, "did you notice in the last flash that Amalgamated Planetoid shares have climbed to —"

Biff! Fun's bladder dented Mr. Goldfarb's fuzzy homburg and Fun roared triumphantly, "Caught you talking news, Mr. Goldfarb! Next you'll be reading inch-thick newspapers, like the ancients did to pass away holidays. The forfeit is to wear your hat upside down for the next three days."

Mr. Goldfarb shrugged happily, upended the Homburg so he looked like an ancient bearded sailor, and headed for the food tables.

Things got livelier. Rotary, Baptist Church, Volunteer Fire Department, and Space Veterans put on acts and skits — just little stuff, the big shows were for tomorrow: the town's own live movies on real stages, the town's own lifesize TV shows without screens, ballets they danced themselves, games they played with their own hands, races they ran with their own feet, poetry they read with their own mouths — not to mention an original epic by Mr. Tomlinson entitled *Roosevelt's Farewell.*

People laughed, people talked, people milled, people mocked, people got it off their chests. It got dark. Small children were herded off to dormitories to be told wonderful stories by parents who baby-sat by turns. The square blossomed with bobbing lanterns. People ate quite a bit and drank quite a little. Space was cleared in the street and the dancing started.

Mr. Felton weaved up to Mr. Wilson, decided that this was the man he'd been arguing with in the dark for a long, long time. "Look," he said with brotherly aggressiveness, "I don't hold with those folk who say America never had any good holidays and parties until now. Why, America's the

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home of holidays." His aplomb became professorial and his tongue began to trip more lightly than any sober man's possibly could. "There's the clambake, the cocktail party, the Sunday school picnic, the convention, the moon-jaunt, the field day, the jam session, the ten-way telephone call, the treasure hunt, the week end, the round-the-world-in-a-day-and-a-half—" He gulped a huge breath and grabbed tight to Mr. Wilson, who showed signs of edging off. "— the pub crawl, the night-to-howl, the barbecue, the wiener roast, the Sunday copter soar, the Kentucky frolic, the county fair, the retreat, the psychodrama, the psychoanalysis, the space-scoot, the blanket party, bundling, the revival, the over-the-top-of-the-world, and the fishing trip!" He waved his arms wildly and proclaimed, "They had Christmas, New Year's, Labor Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Sweetest Day — oh, and all sorts of holidays a man might enjoy with pleasure and profit. Only —" (and he hiccuped wisely) "— they got just a little too profitable."

Miss Kidd, dressed like Cleopatra, glided in front of Mr. Wilson. He put his arms around her.

"I've always wanted to know what it was like to kiss a schoolteacher," he said.

"Now you know," she told him three seconds later.

"Yes, I do," he agreed in awed tones, as Mr. Felton swayed off through the dancers.

It got real dark. New lights flamed and flared. The music got faster. Miss Kidd danced with Mr. Gutknecht. Mr. Felton swooped around with Mrs. Goldfarb. Mr. Kantarian danced with Mrs. Ferguson. Mr. Gianelli danced with Mrs. Lovesmith. Mr. Moriarty danced with Jenny and the wrinkles danced right off his face, maybe into his ears or under his collar. Octavia Tomlinson went to ask Jim Kelly to dance with her, but he saw her coming and ran away into the dark. So Diana strung a silver arrow to her plastic bow and went hunting.

Joy spun and flowers sprang from her dress, joined those underfoot. Friendship waltzed with Love, Fun cut didoes, while Laziness smiled and snoozed by turns. Dark shopfronts all around the square reflected a whirling rout of colors. But overhead there was nothing to turn back the happy hues and they shot upward, through air untroubled by radio waves or the roar of jets, to join those from a hundred thousand other towns on Earth and Mars, and flash a gay message to the twinkling, friendly stars.

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With the publication of her first novel, THE LISTENING HOUSE, *in 1938, it became at once apparent that Mabel Seeley represented, in Howard Haycraft's words, "The White Hope of the American-feminine detective story." Following the plots and technical devices of the Rinehart school, Mrs. Seeley revivified them by realism in character and locale and by what Haycraft calls "a technique of brooding understatement." Unfortunately for enthusiasts of the detective story, Mrs. Seeley has of late abandoned the field for the greater rewards, critical and financial, of straight novels; and fortunately for us, she has developed an interest in imaginative fiction — once again enlivening familiar concepts by depth of character study and powerful understatement. In this, her first published appearance in the fantasy field, she offers a compelling treatment of a theme at least as old as the* ANTIGONE *of Sophocles: the ever-fresh tragedy of the resolutely rational man, who will believe only what he has been taught to accept as logical.*

The Footprint

by MABEL SEELEY

STRANGELY ENOUGH, it was at the Institute of Arts that George Morris first suspected his wife, Daphne, of being unfaithful to him.

Together with Lyle and Marjorie Craddick, on that late May evening, he and Daphne strolled through a traveling exhibit of Moderns, and then, urged by Marjorie Craddick, who seemed insatiable, went on to the permanent galleries. When they came on the Corot — rounding on it, as it were, from a side corridor — he was so bored, so insulated by indifference, that he was wholly unprepared for the amount of distaste — the abhorrence, actually — which that painting touched off in him.

Not through any depicted nakedness; plain nakedness did not unsettle him. No, what was disquieting was that, in the world, there should ever have existed a conception of such unbridled, such unhindered, such enfranchised abandonment. Within the huge frame, which under its lights gave the effect of a window opening on a tree-girt small pleasure lawn, all attention was fixed on a creature half man and half crook-leg goat, hairy head tossed to the drip of grapes pressed by a kneeling nymph, tendoned arms wide to hold two nymphs more, eyes aslant to watch a dance.

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"Those Greeks." He at once spoke his revulsion. "Imagine a religion with ideas as disgusting as that."

"Oh, I don't know," Daphne murmured beside him. "Satyrs — are you sure they aren't fun?"

He turned so swiftly her face wasn't yet masked. In her eyes, on her lips, as she looked at the painting, lay something lit, willful and yielding, as if, for that moment surprised and neglectful, she gazed in at something terribly, secretly, burningly known to her. After the barest half-instant she came aware of his scrutiny and with eyes completely altering looked to him.

But then — and this was what told him, this was what persuaded him, since nothing else, in this world of the actual, could possibly be true — she turned from him to Lyle Craddick, with the beginnings, at the corners of her lips, of her more familiar, her sharing, her small mocking smile.

Lyle Craddick.

This, then, that he'd so long warded off, this that he'd been so watchful to prevent, had happened.

He'd been fifteen when he saw her first; often he remembered how lingeringly, with her demureness covering her like a glaze, she'd walked into a classroom where he stood with other boys. Even at that time, when she too was fifteen, nothing more than her entrance was needed to strike each male who saw her to a focused intentness; her body, at fifteen, was already delectable, her eyes sootily dark gray, her hair downy bronze. But he alone in that group of boys had had the sureness, the immediately-forged determination, to step toward her.

"You're new in school? There's an empty chair next to mine. . . ."

From the first, he had been indispensable. She had no care for lessons; he did them. She liked picnics and wood rambles, lake-living and movies, ice skating and dancing, arms around her and kissing; he furnished these, scarcely leaving her except for sleep, at her grandparents' door. It was, he knew, a tribute to his almost incredibly deft guardianship that when he married her, at eighteen, she was virgin.

"This is Daphne," he'd said to his mother, after the week-end; his mother had needed no more than the one look at Daphne to meet, gracefully, an accomplished and irrevocable fact; his mother had known what her preoccupations must be; his mother moved with them, that first summer of their marriage, to the country house which still, ten years later, made their residence.

"You like it here?" he fairly often asked Daphne.

"Of course, George," Daphne always answered him cheerfully. "It's much nicer out here than in town."

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The country was where her interests lay, her simple, physical interests. While he went to college and, later, began at the bank, she showed less and less fondness for the clubs and parties to which his mother drove her, cared less for city movies, city shopping; her time went on their horses, which she rode at shows, winning ribbons; she liked to kneel, herself earth-smeared and sun-soaked, working their garden, liked napping at noon in thick grass near gray rock, liked long lazy days in the nearby woods, woods of which George Morris had rich, secret use.

"George, love me now, George, now," Daphne said on Sunday afternoons when they came on small, leaf-hidden glades. "Not indoors, George. Here, out here. . . ."

Any meetings with people were attended by his mother or by him. Her very meeting with Lyle Craddick came through him.

"Smile at Lyle, Daphne," he'd told her, at one of the bank parties. "New in my department, but shaping up. He's a good Joe, Lyle."

Contemptuously, saying it, he'd thought Craddick one of the negligibles. Over-tall, flat-sided, beak-nosed and flange-jointed, just the fellow to be saddled with an arty pushing wife and three children. No one to be a threat, like Dick Heggeman or Perry O'Manion. Tolerantly, when the Craddicks were invited for dinner, he'd been no more than amused when Lyle was so besotted by Daphne that he fell over a chair in the livingroom and showed himself scatter-witted at table. It came to be a game — leaving Lyle alone with Daphne for five minutes or six in the garden; soliciting Marjorie, "Come talk to me; let Daphne enjoy Lyle." Maneuvering, when they saw a play, so that Lyle sat next to Daphne there too.

"What'd you think of that third scene in the second act, the one where the girl eavesdrops?" he asked Craddick afterward.

"Second? Oh, that one where the girl — well, I —"

"Just what I thought. You slept through it. Next time we'll take in a movie; I like a good movie myself."

But not, of course, really relaxing. Not letting Lyle and Daphne out of earshot. Or letting phone calls go unheard. Or letters unexplained.

So, up to the night at the Art Institute. After that, of course, he knew that sometime and somewhere he'd slipped. Sometime and somewhere he'd have to kill Craddick.

Removing Craddick, as he told himself, was like managing any competitor. You surveyed your position, your chances, and moved forthrightly on, seeing to it, of course, that no onus, whatever, fell where it shouldn't fall.

For a weapon he need scarcely take thought. Not in Elkins' bank. Elkins, the old man, was a crime reader. Elkins' bank was what Elkins called hold-up

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proof. Cashiers, at Elkins' bank, stood behind shatterproof glass, charged wires circled the tops of their cages, revolvers lay ready in cubbyholes under the money shelves.

Lyle's death, then, would come simply, by gunshot. A suicide, likely. Lyle would go out well tainted. Better, much better, if Lyle went out linked to his transgression. . . .

Assignations with Daphne. Where and how, under Heaven, were they kept?

Working hours for Lyle Craddick were the same as his own. Craddick couldn't possibly have had meetings with Daphne in working hours. And except for working hours he himself — not his mother, but he, himself — was seldom for minutes from Daphne's side. They ate together, went out or entertained together, slept together, on Saturdays rode or worked together. . . .

This last winter, this last spring, he'd taken to sleeping late Sundays. After a late Saturday bedtime, a hard week, he'd started being lazy. While Daphne who needed so little sleep, Daphne who so languorously dozed through the noon hours, Daphne was up and out early. In the house, he had thought. Or the garden. But no, he knew now. In the woods. The one break, the one flaw in his bastions.

It was on Sunday afternoons, so often, that Daphne wandered the wood paths with him.

Old Elkins spoke to him.

"— touch of dizziness, George? I'll send out for a Bromo, or soda."

He answered, "Oh, no, I — no thanks. Guess I was a bit dizzy, a moment there; it's gone now. May need my glasses changed."

"Can't have you falling apart, my boy; owe it to the bank to look after yourself."

As if the bank, the *bank* mattered. Old Elkins, before this, had expressed regard for him. "You've a cool head, my boy, a shrewd eye." Success at the bank . . . oh, of course he wanted it. But the look in men's eyes when they came upon Daphne, the look when they turned to him — "You, who are you to hold this?" — that was what lifted and toughened him, as nothing to do with the bank ever could.

Sometime, somewhere Lyle had whispered to Daphne, "I must," and Daphne had soundlessly answered, "My woods — Sunday morning."

Perhaps on that very same Sunday . . .

Kill him there, his veins said, *kill him there where they've met. No, not there*, his mind soberly counseled. Lyle, killed in the country where he knew only George and Daphne . . . No finger was to fall on Daphne, either.

Later that same day Lyle Craddick stood near him, placing ink-columned

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sheets on the desk. "These check, now." Then, halting, "I've been meaning to ask — how's your — how's Daphne? We haven't seen her for — not since the Art Institute. Marjorie was saying this morning — she's well, I hope?"

The fellow's eyes were beseeching and lost.

In George a pendulum harshly swung. *But he can't have gotten her.* The lostness, the beseeching, in themselves were tell-tale; no ounce of sly triumph existed in Craddick, no sureness, no mastery.

Had he been, then, mistaken? Had Daphne, with that glance at the Institute, merely appealed, through Craddick, to an understanding existing in every man? He couldn't kill Craddick for nothing. The week end now coming must tell him.

With attention grown sober and minute, he rode out with Daphne on Saturday, watching each glance of her eyes and each flick of her whip as they pounded a country lane, catching each greeting and word to the men they met. At home on the Saturday evening he lay through the long wakeful hours while she lightly slept, rousing to each breath she drew, the rise of silk on her rounded soft breasts, the turns of her body in the bed. It was five when she more strongly stirred, luxuriously stretching; mistaken, his wish said to him then; she would turn again, sleep again. But he hadn't been mistaken. With a different rousing she soon lay poised and held, waiting; then lifted herself on an elbow to peer at his face. The secret, the mockery, grew on her lips once more; soundlessly she slid from him. In a matter of seconds — gown swirling, flying up from the cream of her thighs, the miraculous indenting of her waist, the soft curve of her shoulders; petticoat and dress sliding downward to cover her, sandals buckling swiftly on impatient feet — she was gone from the room.

Gone, and with stealth. No, no mistaking it. As soundless as she, then, he rose to walk to the window, through its pane and curtains catching the more open mischief, the glee, which she tossed over a shoulder as she sped across grass toward the woods. In her hands was a basket of strawberries. Not enough that she meet this adulterer; she must also, from her husband's own garden, regale him.

Pulled by contrary needs — one to follow and see, one to stay in self-sparing — he emerged on a course different from either: today, at least, he could prevent. He lifted the window sash.

"Daphne!"

A flicker of blue hesitated behind a bush, toward the woods. But, caught, she came back.

"George?" Reply drifted slowly up.

"What're you off for? A wood-breakfast? Wait for me." So swiftly he dressed and got down to her that she was still at the wood edge, perched on

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flat gray rock, nibbling a strawberry, when he approached. But her face, as she turned it, was entirely placid and candid.

"I disturbed you, poor darling? I'm sorry. But now I'll have company. Here, try a strawberry."

"You were off for the woods," he said. "It's a beautiful morning; let's go along. So fast and so quietly not even the ground squirrels can run from us."

Not much more than stillness then, either. On her mouth, in the look of her sooty gray eyes. She knew then, though, that he knew. Yet she followed unfaltering when he moved to his search, beginning at one end of the wood plot, moving forward and back in straight lines; she couldn't possibly — not in the time it took him to get to her — have warned Lyle, but it wasn't his search the woods favored, it was her guilt. No parked car showed anywhere, no man's figure furtively slid away; in the wood's orchestration — silky rustle of leaf, sleepy peeping of bird, tiny scurry of paws — the only more human note was that of some far-away farm boy, practicing a piccolo. Never any loud or more definite passage upon which he could pounce.

At last he threw himself into a grassy glade, defeated and spent. The sun by that time was midway in its morning arc.

"George, where are you? Oh, here." Daphne more slowly came. "Heavens, George, why did you hurry so? I couldn't keep up. You're actually blowing! Here, now, have that strawberry —"

She knelt to him, laughing and teasing him, only lightly concealing her triumph, but reaching to ruffle his hair.

She said, "Morning's a nice wild time. . . ."

Trees, since the beginning of time, fostered license. Banks, though, were constricted and man-built. In banks action followed on plan.

At 5 o'clock, on an afternoon of the week then ensuing, he lifted his head as Lyle Craddick came past his desk.

"Leaving?" The one word came readily.

"Unless you —" Lyle shuffled his wretched feet.

"One total's off, here, in your pay-out sheet."

Occurrence of any day; other workers continued to dally past, nodding good-nights both to George and to Lyle as they passed.

"Check your originals back," he suggested soon. Smoothly in place was the fact of no night patrol; old Elkins trusted his circuit alarms. When quiet had fallen he stepped to a cashier's cage, stepped back.

"You might have known this was coming," he told Craddick, but Craddick was dead, then; Craddick put up no resistance when his senseless limp fingers were pressed on a wiped gun; Craddick offered no objection when his records were altered — ones skillfully changed into tens, fours and

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nines — so that he stood 7,000 short, exactly a sum taken earlier from the bank funds. A sum, incidentally, marked to go, later, to Marjorie Craddick. It wasn't for bank funds that Lyle Craddick lay dead.

Astonishing, almost, how rightly it went. How courteous, when morning came, were the police, how ready examiners to accept a theft, how skilled the bank officials at hushing this unhappy incident. One or two soberly mourned to him, "Just so many can't take it." He as soberly answered, "All this dough around — it needs a solid belief in the final unimportance of money."

There was one disappointment, one only. Daphne, in the loss of a lover, showed so little awareness or grief.

"I can't imagine anyone wanting to be dead," she said when he told her, sorry and subdued, but no more than that. "I can't think that anything, ever, really wants to be dead."

For the second time, in connection with Craddick, he was visited by a horrible — yes, this time, truly horrible — swing of the pendulum, and when on the Sunday next following she again quietly slipped from their bed, when she returned at noon wearing a thinner mask, the triumph strong under it, he was almost prepared.

Not Craddick. It had never been Craddick. Craddick, that lumbering innocent, Craddick might as well at that moment be alive, seated at dinner with his arty unappetizing wife and three brats, worrying over his records — Craddick might as well be distraught by his unappeased hungers. He'd misread the exchange at the Institute. Guilt on Daphne's part, yes. But no more than awareness on Lyle's.

Some other man.

From thenceforward a watch never less than relentless. Dick Heggeman. Perry O'Manion. Men who'd openly said they'd win her away if they could; men who frankly, before him, solicited. Men at dinners, at parties, at horse shows, in casual encounters; men who invaded his premises, workmen. Always scrutiny and awareness, always suspicion but also uncertainty. Gradually, though, over weeks, a different perception growing. Daphne these days was less open to men than she once had been. More immured.

Content with her lover now, satisfied. This too he must drink to its bottom. Satisfied in a way she never had been satisfied by him. "She spends a good deal of time in the woods, doesn't she?" he said to his mother, and his mother answered smiling, "Scarcely a day goes by." *Safe for her*, his mother said, under the smile. *No one except a few farm children frequents those woods.* He too — he, once — had thought the woods safe for her. Fool, he might have cried now, couldn't you have seen what she was up to there?

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When he'd started for work the next morning he swung about at a near crossroad, returning to his house a half hour after he'd left it.

"Headache," he explained to his mother, and was off for the woods. But he didn't find Daphne; it was she who found him when she came wandering back, basket empty, at noon.

"Where were you, in that wood?" he asked furiously. "I looked for you everywhere."

"Where was I?" she echoed, with the eternal mockery. "Oh, just around in it. I wasn't expecting you."

That whole week he stayed home, and at last with this maneuver her concealments grew wearier; a little wry petulance sat on her mouth. Yet — and it might have been she now who was watching — she laughed and invited him: "I saw wild raspberries yesterday, almost ready for picking; let's find them today." "There's bloodroot down under those bushes; let's come back tomorrow and transplant some." Never once, during that week, did he hear the footfall, see the heel scar, or glimpse the coat thread on the thorn, yet for each hour he spent in the thickets he was more sure of an alien presence there. He was one day so sure and so furious he openly beat the woods, flailing wide with a whip in the underbrush, lashing down branches, thorn thickets, high grass. Daphne ran at heel crying, "George, what's wrong with you, George? George, what's wrong?" But she now wasn't the one he would answer, not she nor her voice, which rang loudly and carried, the trees sustaining it, it and the pipe of the infernal farmer's boy, forever at practice.

He halted, on that day, but not in defeat. In town he applied for a permit and bought a gun; he saw Elkins.

"You know, it's a nice life you lead out here, you and mother," he was affably able to tell Daphne that evening. "I've never realized, before this week. I've been taking the bank too hard — it's not at all necessary; we've money enough. Daphne, you're all that counts — I'm giving up the bank. We'll buy land around; farm, if you like. We can travel —"

She was, for the instant, entirely still.

On the mornings of his week at home she had waited, rising when he rose. But on Sunday he woke in a bed holding no warmth of flesh save his own.

He leaped then, leaped quickly. Did he catch, as he vaulted a porch rail, a last flicker of blue? Grass from heavy dewfall was slippery, thorns caught him, branches slapped; more than before that other presence was palpable, seeming almost to exist as a scent, and the wood of itself held a brooding expectancy, as if in its separate components — tree trunk, leaf and branch, needled pathway and brush clump, birds huddled in nest cups, insects

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clinging to sap-rich veins — it waited in common suspension. His onrush this morning, though, wasn't to be hindered or blunted; whip in hand and revolver in pocket he beat the wood as before he had beat it, leaving no ground space unflailed, moving rapidly forward and backward.

And this time he found her. Not far into the morning, either. Quite soon. Found her sitting on her heels in a grassy glade, alone but openly, lately left. Hair touseled, dress torn, eyes bright. Eyes wickedly bright, their concealments all shed.

Her two hands lifted easily, slowly, like birds' wings rising, to toss back her hair.

"You were looking for me?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. When he saw her his rush had died, but he took another step forward. "Who was here?"

She looked away from him, reaching for a blackberry in her basket, parting her lips for it.

"You — should have left things as they were," she said. "It's always a mistake, George, believing only what you're able to believe. Now you'll never be happy again."

She stood up, coming toward him; he held out his hands to retain her, but it was awkward, with the whip; she slid easily past.

"If you stay, you'll see," she said. Then, back over her shoulder, with increasing remoteness, "Remember Lyle Craddick? I thought Lyle Craddick was — rather nice."

He lost her, let her go, didn't really see her, his eyes fixed on the path at the point where she'd stepped past him. There in bare earth was the foot-scar for which he'd been hunting, the intruder's mark. Only what he was seeing would never be possible, had never in this world been possible; men had so decided long ago. What he was seeing was no heel print, no sole print —

What was it Daphne said? "I can't think that anything, ever, can really want to be dead —"

The impulsions which so far had moved him — his watching, his removal of Craddick, his insights, his hunting — had risen from strong needs and angers; he had only to find, to destroy. But now something different, a melting, began in him. A melting allied to the feeling he'd had when he looked at the Corot . . .

Leaves rustled, quite near him. Softness, as well as distance, makes a pipe sound far away. When he turned, the revolver lay forgotten in his pocket, and the whip, fallen, circled his feet.

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Let us suppose that you, as the resident of a pleasant English town, make the appalling discovery that you have a mad scientist as nearby neighbor. True, said mad scientist does not possess the traditional beautiful daughter but he is most certainly following that grisly trail blazed by the good Dr. Moreau. What would you do? It is a problem that might confront any of us at any time. To set our minds at rest John Wyndham offers a proven method of not only foiling the sadistic savant but completely disposing of his outrageous creations.

Perfect Creature

by JOHN WYNDHAM

THE FIRST THING I knew of the Dixon affair was when a deputation came from the village of Membury to ask us if we would investigate the alleged curious goings-on there.

But first, perhaps, I had better explain the word *us*.

I happen to hold a post as Inspector for the S.S.M.A. — in full, the Society for the Suppression of the Maltreatment of Animals — in the District that includes Membury. Now, please don't assume that I am wobble-minded on the subject of animals. I needed a job. A friend of mine who has influence with the Society got it for me; and I do it, I think, conscientiously. As for the animals themselves, well, as with humans, I like some of them. In that, I differ from my co-Inspector, Alfred Weston; he likes — liked? — them all; on principle, and indiscriminately.

It could be that, at the salaries they pay, the S.S.M.A. has doubts of its personnel — though there is the point that where legal action is to be taken two witnesses are desirable; but, whatever the reason, there is a practice of appointing their Inspectors as pairs to each District. One result of which was my daily and close association with Alfred.

Now, one might describe Alfred as the animal-lover par excellence. Between him and all animals there was complete affinity — at least, on Alfred's side. It wasn't his fault if the animals didn't quite understand it; he tried hard enough. The very thought of four feet or feathers seemed to do something to him. He cherished them one and all and was apt to talk of

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them, and to them, as if they were his dear, dear friends temporarily embarrassed by a diminished I.Q.

Alfred himself was a well-built man, though not tall, who peered through heavily rimmed glasses with an earnestness that seldom lightened. The difference between us was that while I was doing a job, he was following a vocation — pursuing it wholeheartedly, and with a powerful imagination to energise him.

It didn't make him a restful companion. Under the powerful magnifier of Alfred's imagination the commonplace became lurid. A run-of-the-mill allegation of horse-thrashing would bring phrases about fiends, barbarians, and brutes in human form leaping into his mind with such vividness that he would be bitterly disappointed when we discovered, as we invariably did, a) that the thing had been much exaggerated, anyway; and, b) that the perpetrator had either had a drink too many or briefly lost his temper.

It so happened that we were in the office together on the morning that the Membury deputation arrived. They were a more numerous body than we usually received and as they filed in I could see Alfred's eyes begin to widen in anticipation of something really good — or horrific, depending on which way you were looking at it. Even I felt that this ought to produce something a cut above cans tied to cats' tails.

Our premonitions were right. There was a certain confusion in the telling, but when we had it sorted out, it seemed to amount to this:

Early the previous morning, one Tim Darrell, while engaged in his usual task of hauling the milk to the station, had encountered a phenomenon in the village street. The sight had so surprised him that, while stamping on his brakes, he had let out a yell which brought the whole place to its windows or doors. The men had gaped, and most of the women had set up screaming when they, too, saw the pair of creatures that were standing in the middle of their street.

The best picture of these creatures that we could get out of our visitors suggested that they must have looked more like turtles than anything else — though a very improbable kind of turtle that walked upright upon its hind legs.

The overall height of the apparitions would seem to have been about five foot six. Their bodies were covered with oval carapaces, not only at the back, but in front, too. The heads were about the size of normal human heads, but without hair, and having a horny surface. Their large, bright black eyes were set above a hard, shiny projection, debatably a beak or a nose.

But this description, while unlikely enough, did not cover the most troublesome characteristic — and the one upon which all were agreed despite other variations. This was that from the ridges at the sides, where

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the back and front carapaces joined, there protruded, some two-thirds of the way up, a pair of human arms and hands!

Well, about that point I suggested what anyone else would: that it was a hoax, a couple of fellows dressed up for a scare.

The deputation was indignant. For one thing, it convincingly said, no one was going to keep up that kind of hoax in the face of gunfire — which was what old Haliday who kept the saddler's had given them. He had let them have a half dozen rounds out of a twelve bore. This hadn't worried the things a bit and the pellets had just bounced off.

But when people had got around to emerging cautiously from their doors to take a closer look, that had seemed to upset them. They had squawked harshly at one another and then set off down the street at a kind of waddling run. Half the village, feeling braver now, had followed them. The creatures had not seemed to have any idea of where they were going and had run out over Baker's Marsh. There they had soon stuck in one of the soft spots, and finally they had sunk out of sight into it, with a great deal of floundering and squawking. The village, after talking it over, had decided to come to us rather than to the police. It was well meant, no doubt, but, as I said:

"I really don't see what you can expect us to do if the creatures have vanished without trace."

"Moreover," put in Alfred, never strong on tact, "it sounds to me that we should have to report that the villagers of Membury simply hounded these unfortunate creatures — whatever they were — to their deaths and made no attempt to save them."

They looked somewhat offended at that, but it turned out that they had not finished. The tracks of the creatures had been followed back as far as possible and the consensus was that they could not have had their source anywhere but in Membury Grange.

"Who lives there?" I asked.

It was a Doctor Dixon, they told me. He had been there these last three or four years.

And that led us on to Bill Parsons' contribution. He was a little hesitant about making it at first.

"This'll be confidential like?" he asked.

Everyone for miles around knows that Bill's chief concern is other people's rabbits. I reassured him.

"Well, it was this way," he said. "'Bout three months ago it'd be . . ."

Pruned of its circumstantial detail, Bill's story amounted to this: finding himself, so to speak, in the grounds of the Grange one night, he had taken a fancy to investigate the nature of the new wing that Doctor Dixon had caused to be built on soon after he came. There had been considerable local

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speculation about it, and, seeing a chink of light between the curtains there, Bill had taken his opportunity.

"I'm telling you, there's things that's not right there," he said. "The very first thing I seen, back against the far wall, was a line of cages with great thick bars to 'em — the way the light hung I couldn't see what was inside. But why'd anybody be wanting them in his house?

"And then when I shoved myself up higher to get a better look, there in the middle of the room I saw a norrible sight — a norrible sight it was!" He paused for a dramatic shudder.

"Well, what was it?" I asked patiently.

"It was — well, it's kind of hard to tell. Lying on a table, it was, though. Lookin' more like a white bolster than anything — 'cept that it was moving a bit. Kind of inching, with a sort of ripple in it — if you understand me."

I didn't much.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"That it's not," Bill told me, approaching his climax with relish. "Most of it didn't 'ave no real shape, but there was a part of it as did — a pair of hands, human hands, a-stickin' out from the sides of it . . ."

In the end I got rid of the deputation with the assurance that we would look into the matter. When I turned back from closing the door behind the last of them I perceived that all was not well with Alfred. His eyes were gleaming widely behind his glasses and he was trembling.

"Sit down," I advised him. "You don't want to go shaking parts of yourself off."

I could see that there was a dissertation coming, probably something to beat what we had just heard. But, for once, he wanted my opinion first, while manfully contriving to hold his own down for a time. I obliged.

"It has to turn out simpler than it sounds," I told him. "Either somebody *was* playing a joke on the village — or there were some very unusual animals which they've distorted by talking it over too much."

"They were unanimous about the carapaces and arms — two structures as thoroughly incompatible as can be," Alfred said, tiresomely.

I had to grant that. And arms — or, at least, hands — had been the only describable feature of the bolster-like object that Bill had seen at the Grange. . . .

Alfred gave me several other reasons why I was wrong and then paused meaningly.

"I, too, have heard rumors about Membury Grange," he told me.

"Such as?" I asked.

"Nothing very definite," he admitted. "But when one puts them all

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together . . . After all, there's no smoke without some sort of fire. . . ."

"All right, let's have it," I invited him.

"I think," he said, with impressive earnestness, "I think we are on the track of something *big* here. Very likely something that will at last stir people's consciences to the iniquities which are practised under the cloak of scientific research. Do you know what I think is happening on our very doorstep?"

"I'll buy it," I told him.

"I think we have to deal with a super-vivisectionist!" he said, wagging a dramatic finger at me.

I frowned. "I don't get that," I told him. "A thing is either vivi- or it isn't. Super-vivi- just doesn't —"

"Tcha!" said Alfred. At least, it was that kind of noise. "What I mean is that we are up against a man who is outraging nature, abusing God's creatures, wantonly distorting the forms of animals until they are no longer recognisable, or only in parts, as what they were before he started distorting them," he announced involvedly.

At this point I began to get a line on the truly Alfredian theory that was being propounded this time. His imagination had got its teeth well in and, though later events were to show that it was not biting quite deeply enough, I laughed.

"I see it," I said. "I've read *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, too. You expect to go up to the Grange and be greeted by a horse walking on its hind legs and discussing the weather. Or perhaps you hope a super-dog will open the door to you and inquire your name?

"A thrilling idea, Alfred. But this is real life, you know. Since there has been a complaint, we must try to investigate it, but I'm afraid you're going to be dreadfully disappointed, old man, if you're looking forward to going into a house filled with the sickly fumes of ether and hideous with the cries of tortured animals. Just come off it a bit, Alfred. Come down to earth."

But Alfred was not to be deflated so easily. His fantasies were an important part of his life and, while he was a little irritated by my discerning the source of his inspiration, he was not quenched. Instead, he went on turning the thing over in his mind and adding a few extra touches to it here and there.

"Why turtles?" I heard him mutter. "It only seems to make it more complicated, to choose reptiles."

He contemplated that for some moments, then he added:

"Arms. Arms and hands! Now where on earth would he get a pair of arms from?"

His eyes grew still larger and more excited as he thought about that.

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"Now, now! Keep a hold on it!" I advised him.

All the same, it was an awkward, uneasy kind of question . . .

The following afternoon Alfred and I presented ourselves at the lodge of Membury Grange and gave our names to the suspicious-looking man who lived there to guard the entrance. He shook his head to indicate that we hadn't a hope of approaching more closely, but he did pick up the telephone.

I had a somewhat unworthy hope that his discouraging attitude might be confirmed. The thing ought, of course, to be followed up, if only to pacify the villagers, but I could have wished that Alfred had had longer to go off the boil. At present, his agitation and expectation were, if anything, increased. The fancies of Poe and Zola are mild compared with the products of Alfred's imagination powered by suitable fuel. All night long, it seemed, the most horrid nightmares had galloped through his sleep and he was now in a vein where such phrases as the 'wanton torturing of our dumb friends' by 'the fiendish wielders of the knife,' and 'the shuddering cries of a million quivering victims ascending to high heaven' came tripping off his tongue automatically. It was awkward. If I had not agreed to accompany him, he would certainly have gone alone, in which case he would be likely to come to some kind of harm on account of the generalised accusations of mayhem, mutilation, and sadism with which he would undoubtedly open any conversation.

In the end I had persuaded him that his course would be to keep his eyes cunningly open for telling evidence while I conducted the interview. Later, if he was not satisfied, he would be able to say his piece. I just had to hope that he would be able to withstand the internal pressure.

The guardian turned back to us from the telephone, wearing a surprised expression.

"He says as he'll see you!" he told us, as though not quite certain he had heard aright. "You'll find him in the new wing — that red-brick part, there."

The new wing, into which the poaching Bill had spied, turned out to be much bigger than I had expected. It covered a ground area quite as large as that of the original house, but was only one storey high. A door in the end of it opened as we drove up and a tall, loosely clad figure with an untidy beard stood waiting for us there.

"Good Lord!" I said as we approached. "So that was why we got in so easily! I'd no idea you were that Dixon. Who'd have thought it?"

"Come to that," he retorted, "you seem to be in a surprising occupation for a man of intelligence, yourself."

I remembered my companion.

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"Alfred," I said, "I'd like to introduce you to Doctor Dixon — once a poor usher who tried to teach me something about biology at school, but later, by popular repute, the inheritor of millions, or thereabouts."

Alfred looked suspicious. This was obviously wrong. A move towards fraternization with the enemy at the very outset! He nodded ungraciously and did not offer to shake hands.

"Come in!" Dixon invited.

He showed us into a comfortable study-cum-office which tended to confirm the rumors of his inheritance. I sat down in a magnificent easy chair.

"You'll very likely have gathered from your watchman that we're here in an official way," I said. "So perhaps it would be better to get the business over before we celebrate the reunion. It'd be a kindness to relieve the strain on my friend Alfred."

Doctor Dixon nodded and cast a speculative glance at Alfred who had no intention of compromising himself by sitting down.

"I'll give you the report just as we had it," I told him and proceeded to do so. When I reached a description of the turtle-like creatures he looked somewhat relieved.

"Oh, so that's what happened to them," he said.

"Ah!" cried Alfred, his voice going up into a squeak with excitement. "So you admit it! You admit that you are responsible for those two unhappy creatures!"

Dixon looked at him wonderingly.

"I *was* responsible for them — but I didn't know they were unhappy. How did you?"

Alfred disregarded the question.

"That's what we want," he squeaked. "He admits that he —"

"Alfred," I told him coldly. "Do be quiet! And stop dancing about! Let me get on with it."

I got on with it for a few more sentences but Alfred was building up too much pressure to hold. He cut right in.

"Where — where did you get the arms? Just tell me where *they* came from?" he demanded, with deadly meaning.

"Your friend seems a little over — er, a little dramatic," remarked Dr. Dixon.

"Look, Alfred," I said severely, "just let me get finished, will you? You can introduce your note of ghoulery later on."

When I ended, it was with an excuse that seemed necessary. I said to Dixon: "I'm sorry to intrude on you with all this, but you see how we stand. When supported allegations are laid before us we have no choice but to investigate. Obviously this is something quite out of the usual run, but I'm

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sure you'll be able to clear it up satisfactorily for us. And now, Alfred," I added, turning to him, "I believe you have a question or two to ask, but do try to remember that our host's name is Dixon and not Moreau."

Alfred leapt, as from a slipped leash.

"What I want to know is the meaning, the reason, and the method of these outrages against nature. I demand to be told by what right this man considers himself justified in turning normal creatures into unnatural mockeries of natural forms."

Dr. Dixon nodded gently.

"A comprehensive inquiry — though not too comprehensibly expressed," he said. "I deplore the loose, recurrent use of the word 'nature' — and would point out that the word 'unnatural' is a vulgarism which does not even make sense. Obviously, if a thing has been done at all it was in someone's nature to do it, and in the nature of the material to accept whatever was done. One can only act within the limits of one's nature. That is an axiom."

"A lot of hair-splitting isn't going to —" began Alfred, but Dixon continued smoothly.

"Nevertheless, I think I understand you to mean that my nature has prompted me to use certain material in a manner which your prejudices do not approve. Would that be right?"

"There may be lots of ways of putting it, but I call it vivisection — *vivisection!*" said Alfred, relishing the word like a good curse. "You may have a licence. But there have been things going on here that will require a very convincing explanation indeed to stop us taking the matter to the police."

Doctor Dixon nodded.

"I rather thought you might have some such idea. And I'd rather you did not. Before long, the whole thing will be announced by me and become public knowledge. Meanwhile, I want at least two, possibly three, months to get my findings ready for publication. When I have explained, I think you will understand my position better."

He paused, thoughtfully eyeing Alfred who did not look like a man intending to understand anything. He went on.

"The crux of this is that I have not, as you are suspecting, either grafted, or readjusted, nor in any way distorted living forms. I have *built* them."

For a moment, neither of us grasped the significance of that — though Alfred thought he had it.

"Ha! You can quibble," he said, "but there had to be a basis. You must have had some kind of living animal to start with. One which you wickedly mutilated to produce these horrors."

But Dixon shook his head.

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"No, I mean what I said. I have *built* — and then I have induced a kind of life into what I have built."

We gaped.

I said uncertainly, "Are you really claiming that you can create a living creature?"

"Pooh!" he said. "Of course I can. So can you. Even Alfred here can do that, with the help of a female of the species. What I am telling you is that I can animate the inert because I have found how to induce the — or, at any rate, *a* life-force."

The lengthy pause that followed that was broken at last by Alfred.

"I don't believe it," he said loudly. "It isn't possible that you, here in this one-eyed village, should have solved the mystery of life. You're just trying to hoax us because you're afraid of what we shall do."

Dixon smiled calmly.

"I said that I had found *a* life-force. There may be dozens of other kinds for all I know. I can understand that it's difficult for you to believe. But, after all, why not? Someone was bound to find one of them somewhere sooner or later. What's more surprising to me is that this one wasn't discovered before."

But Alfred was not to be soothed.

"I don't believe it," he repeated. "Nor will anybody else unless you produce proofs — if you can."

"Of course," agreed Dixon. "Who would take it on trust? Though I'm afraid that when you examine my present specimens you may find the construction a little crude at first. Your friend, Nature, puts in such a lot of unnecessary work that can be simplified out.

"Of course, in the matter of arms that seems to worry you so much, if I could have obtained real arms immediately after the death of their owner I might have been able to use them — I'm not sure whether it wouldn't have been more trouble, though. However, such things are not usually handy and the building of simplified parts is not really difficult — a mixture of engineering, chemistry, and commonsense. Indeed, it has been quite possible for some time but without the means of animating them it was scarcely worth doing. One day they may be made finely enough to replace a lost limb, but a very complicated technique will have to be evolved before that can be done.

"As for your suspicion that my specimens suffer, Mr. Weston, I assure you that they are coddled — they have cost me a great deal of money and work. And, in any case, it would be difficult for you to prosecute me for cruelty to an animal hitherto unheard of, with habits unknown."

"I am not convinced," said Alfred stoutly.

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The poor fellow was, I think, too upset by the threat to his theory for the true magnitude of Dixon's claim to reach him.

"Then, perhaps a demonstration . . ." Dixon suggested. "If you will follow me?"

Bill's peeping exploit had prepared us for the sight of the steel barred cages in the laboratory but not for many of the other things we found there — one of them was the smell.

Doctor Dixon apologised as we choked and gasped.

"I forgot to warn you about the preservatives."

"It's reassuring to know that that's all they are," I said between coughs.

The room must have been nearly 100 in length and about 30 high. Bill had certainly seen precious little through his chink in the curtain and I stared in amazement at the quantities of apparatus gathered there. There was a rough division into sections; chemistry in one corner, bench and lathes in another, electrical apparatus grouped at one end and so on. In one of several bays stood an operating table, with cases of instruments to hand. Alfred's eyes widened at the sight of it and an expression of triumph began to enliven his face. In another bay there was more the suggestion of a sculptor's studio, with moulds and casts lying about on tables. Further on were large presses, and sizeable electric furnaces, but most of the gear other than the simplest conveyed little to me.

"No cyclotron, no electron-microscope. Otherwise, a bit of everything," I remarked.

"You're wrong there. There's the electron — Hullo! Your friend's off."

Alfred had sort of homed at the operating table. He was peering intently all around and under it, presumably hoping for bloodstains. We walked after him.

"Here's one of the chief primers of that ghastly imagination of yours," Dixon said. He opened a drawer, took out an arm, and laid it on the operating table. "Take a look at that."

The thing was a waxy yellow. In shape, it did have a close resemblance to a human arm, but when I looked closely at the hand, I saw that it was smooth, unmarked by whorls or lines. Nor did it have fingernails.

"Not worth bothering about at this stage," said Dixon, watching me.

Nor was it a whole arm. It was cut off short between the elbow and the shoulder.

"What's that?" Alfred inquired, pointing to a protruding metal rod.

"Stainless steel," Dixon told him. "Much quicker and less expensive than making matrices for pressing bone forms. When I get standardized I'll probably go to plastic bones. One ought to be able to save weight there."

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Alfred was looking worriedly disappointed again. That arm was convincingly non-vivisectional.

"But why an arm? Why any of this?" he demanded, with a wave that largely included the whole room.

"In the order of asking. An arm — or rather, a hand — because it is the most useful tool ever evolved, and I certainly could not think of a better. And 'any of this' because once I had hit upon the basic secret I took a fancy to build as my proof the perfect creature — or as near that as one's finite mind can reach.

"The turtle-like creatures were an early step. They had enough brain to live and produce reflexes, but not enough for constructive thought. It wasn't necessary."

"You mean that your 'perfect creature' does have constructive thought?" I asked.

"She has a brain as good as ours and slightly larger," he said. "Though, of course, she needs experience — education. Still, as the brain is already fully developed, it learns much more quickly than a child's would."

"May we see it — her?" I asked.

He sighed regretfully.

"Everyone always wants to jump straight to the finished product. All right, then. But first we will have a little demonstration. I'm afraid your friend is still unconvinced."

Dixon led us across towards the surgical instrument cases and opened a preserving cupboard there. From it he took a shapeless white mass which he laid on the operating table. This he wheeled towards the electrical apparatus further up the room. Beneath the pallid, sagging object I saw a hand protruding.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Bill's 'bolster with hands'!"

"Yes. He wasn't entirely wrong, though from your account he laid it on a bit. This little fellow is really my chief assistant. He's got all the essential parts; alimentary, vascular, nervous, respiratory. He can, in fact, live. But it isn't a very exciting existence for him — he's a kind of testing motor for trying out newly made appendages."

While he busied himself with some electrical connections he added:

"If you, Mr. Weston, would care to examine the specimen in any way, short of harming it, to convince yourself that it is not alive at present, please do."

Alfred approached the white mass. He peered through his glasses at it closely. He prodded it with a tentative forefinger.

"So the basis is electrical?" I said to Dixon.

He picked up a bottle of some gray concoction and measured out a little.

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"It may be. On the other hand, it may be chemical. You don't think I am going to let you into *all* my secrets, do you?"

When he had finished his preparations he said, "Satisfied, Mr. Weston? I'd rather not be accused later on of having shown you a conjuring trick."

"It doesn't seem to be alive," Alfred admitted cautiously.

We watched Dixon attach several electrodes to it. Then he carefully chose three spots on its surface and injected each from a syringe containing a pale blue liquid. Next, he sprayed the whole form twice from different atomisers. Finally, he closed four or five switches in rapid succession.

"Now," he said, with a slight smile, "we wait for five minutes — which you may spend, if you like, in deciding which, or how many, of my actions were critical."

After three minutes the flaccid mass began to pulsate feebly. Gradually the movement increased until gentle, rythmic undulations were running through it. Presently it half-sagged or rolled to one side, exposing the hand that had been hidden beneath it. I saw the fingers of the hand tense and try to clutch at the smooth table top.

I think I cried out. Until it actually happened, I had been unable to believe that it would. Now some part of the meaning of the thing came flooding in on me. I grabbed Dixon's arm.

"Man!" I said. "If you were to do that to a dead body . . ."

But he shook his head.

"No. It doesn't work. I've tried. One is justified in calling this life, I think. . . . But in some way it's a different kind of life. I don't at all understand why. . . ."

Different kind or not, I knew that I must be looking at the seed of a revolution, with potentialities beyond imagination. . . .

And all the time that fool Alfred kept on poking around the thing as if it were a sideshow at a circus. And he was out to make sure that no one was putting anything across him with mirrors, or working it with bits of string.

It served him right when he got a couple of hundred volts through his fingers.

"And now," said Alfred, when he had satisfied himself that at least the grosser forms of deception were ruled out, "now we'd like to see this 'perfect creature' you spoke about."

He still seemed as far as ever from realising the marvel he had witnessed. He was convinced that an offence of some kind was being committed and he intended to discover the evidence that would assign it to its proper category.

"Very well," agreed Dixon. "By the way, I call her Una. No name I could

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think of seemed quite adequate, but she is certainly the first of her kind, so Una she is."

He led us along the room to the last and largest of the row of cages. Standing a little back from the bars, he called the occupant forward.

I don't know what I expected to see — nor quite what Alfred was hoping for. But neither of us had breath for comment when we did see what lumbered towards us.

Dixon's "perfect creature" was a more horrible grotesquerie than I had ever imagined in life or dreams.

Picture, if you can, a dark, conical carapace of some slightly glossy material. The rounded peak of the cone stood well over six feet from the ground; the base was four foot six or more in diameter. The whole thing was supported on three short, cylindrical legs. There were four arms, parodies of human arms, projecting from joints about halfway up. Eyes, set some six inches below the apex, were regarding us steadily from beneath horny lids. For a moment I felt close to hysterics.

Dixon looked at the thing with pride.

"Visitors to see you, Una," he told it.

The eyes turned to me, and then back to Alfred. One of them blinked, with a click from its lid as it closed. A deep, reverberant voice emerged from no obvious source.

"At last! I've been asking you long enough," it said.

"Good God!" said Alfred. "That appalling thing can talk?"

The steady gaze dwelt upon him.

"That one will do. I like his glass eyes," rumbled the voice.

"Be quiet, Una. This isn't what you think," Dixon interposed. "I must ask you," he added to us, but looking at Alfred, "to be careful in your comments. Una naturally lacks the ordinary background of experience, but she is aware of her distinction — and of her several physical superiorities. She has a somewhat short temper and nothing is going to be gained by offending her. It is natural that you should find her appearance a little surprising at first, but I will explain."

A lecturing note crept into his voice.

"After I had discovered my method of animation, my first inclination was to construct an approximately anthropoid form as a convincing demonstration. On second thought, however, I decided against mere imitation. I resolved to proceed functionally and logically, remedying certain features which seemed to me poorly or weakly designed in man and other existing creatures. It also proved necessary later to make a few modifications for technical and constructional reasons. However, in general, Una is the result of my resolve." He paused, looking fondly at the monstrosity.

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"I — er — you did say *'logically'?*" I inquired.

Alfred paused for some time before making his comment. He went on staring at the creature which still kept its eyes fixed on him. One could almost see him causing what he likes to think of as his better nature to override mere prejudice. He now rose nobly above his earlier, unsympathetic remark.

"I do not consider it proper to confine so large an animal in such restricted quarters," he announced.

One of the horny eyelids clicked again as it blinked.

"I like him. He means well. He will do," the great voice rumbled.

Alfred wilted a little. After a long experience of patronizing dumb friends, he found it disconcerting to be confronted by a creature that not only spoke, but patronized him as it did so. He returned its steady stare uneasily.

Dixon, disregarding the interruption, resumed.

"Probably the first thing that will strike you is that Una has no distinct head. That was one of my earliest rearrangements, the normal head is too exposed and vulnerable. The eyes should be carried high, of course, but there is no need whatever for a semi-detached head.

"But in eliminating the head, there was sight to be considered. I therefore gave her three eyes, two of which you can see now, and one which is round the back — though, properly speaking, she has no back. Thus she is easily able to look and focus in any direction without the complicated device of a semi-rotatory head.

"Her general shape almost ensures that any falling or projected object would glance off the reinforced plastic carapace, but it seemed wise to me to insulate the brain from shock as much as possible by putting it where you might expect the stomach. I was thus able to put the stomach higher and allow for a more convenient disposition of the intestines."

"How does it eat?" I put it.

"Her mouth is round the other side," he said shortly. "Now, I have to admit that at first glance the provision of four arms might give an impression of frivolity. However, as I said before, the hand is the perfect tool — *if* it is the right size. So you will see that Una's upper pair are delicate and finely molded, while the lower are heavily muscular.

"Her respiration may interest you, too. I have used a flow principle. She inhales here, exhales there. An improvement, you must admit, on our own rather disgusting system.

"As regards the general design, she unfortunately turned out to be considerably heavier than I had expected — slightly over one ton, in fact — and to support that I had to modify my original plan somewhat. I redesigned the legs and feet rather after the pattern of the elephant's so as to spread the

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weight, but I'm afraid it is not altogether satisfactory. Something will have to be done in the later models to reduce the overall weight.

"The three-legged principle was adopted because it is obvious that the biped must waste quite a lot of muscular energy in merely keeping its balance and a tripod is not only efficient, but more easily adaptable to uneven surfaces than a four-legged support.

"As regards the reproductory system —"

"Excuse me interrupting," I said, "but with a plastic carapace and stainless steel bones I don't — er — quite see —"

"A matter of glandular balance, regulation of the personality. Something had to be done there, though I admit that I'm not quite satisfied that I have done it the best way. I suspect that an approach on parthenogenetic lines would have been . . . However, there it is. And I have promised her a mate. I must say I find it a fascinating speculation to . . ."

"He will do," interrupted the rumbling voice, while the creature continued to gaze fixedly at Alfred.

"Of course," Dixon went on to us, a little hurriedly, "Una has never seen herself to know what she looks like. She probably thinks she —"

"I know what I want," said the deep voice, firmly and loudly, "I want —"

"Yes, yes," Dixon interposed, also loudly. "I'll explain about that later."

"But I want —" the voice repeated.

"Will you be quiet!" Dixon shouted fiercely.

The creature gave a slight rumbling protest, but desisted.

Alfred drew himself up with the air of one who after communing seriously with his principles is forced into speech.

"I cannot approve of this," he announced. "I will concede that this creature may be your own creation. Nevertheless, once created it becomes, in my opinion, entitled to the same safeguards as any other dumb — er, as any other creature.

"I say nothing whatever about your application of your discovery — except to say that it seems to me that you have behaved like an irresponsible child let loose with modelling clay, and that you have produced an unholy — and I use that word advisedly — unholy mess, a monstrosity, a perversion! However, I say nothing about that.

"What I do say is that in law this creature can be regarded simply as an unfamiliar species of animal. I intend to report that, in my professional opinion, it is being confined in too small a cage and is without proper opportunities for exercise. I am not able to judge whether it is being adequately nourished, but it is easy to perceive that it has needs that are not being met. Twice already when it has attempted to express them to us you have intimidated it."

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"Alfred," I put in, "don't you think that perhaps —" but I was cut short by the creature thrumming like a double bass.

"I think he's wonderful! The way his glass eyes flash! I want him!" It sighed in a kind of deep vibrato that ran along the floor. The sound certainly was extremely mournful, and Alfred's one track mind pounced on it as additional evidence.

"If that is not the plaint of an unhappy creature," he said, stepping closer to the cage, "then I have never —"

"Look out!" shouted Dixon, jumping forward.

One of the creature's hands made a darting snatch through the bars. Simultaneously Dixon caught him by the shoulders, and pulled him back. There was a rending of cloth and three buttons pattered on to the linoleum.

"Phew!" said Dixon.

For the first time, Alfred looked a little alarmed.

"What —?" he began.

A deep, threatening sound from the cage obliterated the rest of it.

"Give him to me! I want him!" rumbled the voice angrily.

All four arms caught hold of the bars. Two of them began to rattle the gate violently. The two visible eyes were fixed unwaveringly on Alfred. He began to show signs of reorientating his outlook. His own eyes opened a little more widely behind his glasses.

"Er — it — it doesn't mean —?" he gasped incredulously.

"I want!" bellowed Una, stamping from one foot to another and shaking the building as she did so.

Dixon was regarding his achievement with some concern.

"I wonder — I wonder, could I have overdone the hormones a bit?" he said thoughtfully.

Alfred had come to grips with the idea now. He backed a little further away from the cage. The move did not have a good effect on Una.

"I want!" she cried, like a kind of sepulchral public address system. "Give me! Give me!"

It was an intimidating sound.

"Mightn't it be better if we —" I suggested.

"Perhaps, in the circumstances —" Dixon agreed.

"Yes!" said Alfred quite decisively.

The pitch on which Una operated made it difficult to be certain of the finer shades of feelings; the window-rattling sound that occurred behind us as we moved off might have expressed anger, or anguish, or both. We increased our pace a little.

"Alfred!" called a voice like a disconsolate foghorn. "I want Alfred!"

Alfred cast a backward glance and stepped out a trifle more smartly.

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There was a thump which rattled the bars and shook the building.

I looked round to see Una in the act of retiring to the back of her cage with the obvious intention of making another onslaught. We ran for the door. Alfred was first through.

A thunderous crash sounded at the other end of the room. As Dixon was closing the door behind us I had a glimpse of Una carrying bars and furnishings before her like a runaway bus.

"I think we shall need some help with her," Dixon said.

Small sparkles of perspiration were standing on Alfred's brow.

"You — you don't think it might be better if we were to —" he began.

"No," said Dixon. "She'd see you through the windows."

"Oh," said Alfred unhappily.

Dixon led the way into a large sitting room, and made for the telephone. He gave urgent messages to the fire brigade and the police.

"I don't think there's anything we can do till they get here," he said, as he put the receiver down. "The lab wing will probably hold her all right if she isn't tantalized any more."

"Tantalized! I like that —" Alfred started to protest, but Dixon went on.

"Luckily, being where she is, she couldn't see the door. So the odds are that she can have no idea of the purpose or nature of doors. What's worrying me most is the damage she's doing in there. Just listen!"

We did listen for some moments to the muffled sounds of smashing, splintering, and rending. Amongst it there was occasionally a mournful di-syllabic boom which might, or might not have been the word 'Alfred.'

Dixon's expression became more anguished as the noise continued.

"All my records! All the work of years is in there," he said bitterly. "Your Society's going to have to pay plenty for this, I warn you — but that won't give me back my records. She was always perfectly docile until your friend excited her — never a moment's trouble with her."

Alfred began to protest again but was interrupted by the sound of something massive being overturned with a thunderous crash, followed by a noise like a waterfall of broken glass.

"I want Alfred!" demanded the stentorian voice.

Alfred half rose, and then sat down again on the edge of his chair. His eyes flicked nervously hither and thither. He displayed a tendency to bite his fingernails.

"Ah!" said Dixon with a suddenness which startled both of us. "Ah, that must have been it! I must have calculated the hormone requirement on the overall weight — *including* the carapace. Of course! What a ridiculous slip to make! Tch-tch! I should've done much better to keep to the original parthenogen — Good heavens!"

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The crash which caused his exclamation brought us all to our feet and across to the door.

Una had discovered the way out of the wing, all right, and had come through it like a bulldozer. Door, frame, and part of the brickwork had come with her. At the moment she was stumbling about amid the resulting mess. Dixon didn't hesitate.

"Quick! Upstairs — that'll beat her," he said.

At the same instant Una spotted us and let out a boom. We sprinted across the hall for the staircase. Initial mobility was our advantage; a freight like Una's takes appreciable time to get under way. I fled up the flight with Dixon ahead of me and, I imagined, Alfred just behind. However, I was not quite right there. I don't know whether Alfred had been momentarily transfixed or had fumbled his takeoff, but when I was at the top I looked back to see him still only a few steps up, with Una thundering in pursuit like a jet propelled car of Juggernaut.

Alfred kept on coming, though. But so did Una. She may not have been familiar with stairs, nor designed to use them. But she tackled them for all that. She even got about five or six steps up before they collapsed under her. Alfred, by then more than halfway up, felt them fall away beneath his feet. He gave a shout as he lost his balance. Then, clawing wildly at the air, he fell backwards.

Una put in as neat a four-armed catch as you could ever hope to see.

"What coordination!" Dixon, behind me, murmured admiringly.

"Help!" bleated Alfred. "Help! Help!"

"Aah!" boomed Una, in a kind of deep diapason of satisfaction.

She backed off a little, with a crunching of timbers.

"Keep calm!" Dixon advised Alfred. "Don't do anything that might startle her."

Alfred, embraced by three arms, and patted affectionately by the fourth, made no immediate reply.

There was a pause for assessment of the situation.

"Well," I said, "we ought to do something. Can't we entice her somehow?"

"It's difficult to know what will distract the triumphant female in her moment of success," observed Dixon.

Una set up a sort of — of — well, if you can imagine an elephant contentedly crooning . . .

"Help!" Alfred bleated again. "She's — *ow!*"

"Calm, calm!" repeated Dixon. "There's probably no real danger. After all, she's a mammal — mostly, that is. Now if she were quite a different kind like, say, a female spider —"

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"I don't think I'd let her overhear about female spiders just now," I suggested. "Isn't there a favorite food, or something, we could tempt her with?"

Una was swaying Alfred back and forth in three arms, and prodding him inquisitively with the forefinger of the fourth. Alfred struggled.

"Damn it, can't you *do* something?" he demanded.

"Oh, Alfred! Alfred!" she reproved him, in a kind of besotted rumble.

"Well," Dixon said, doubtfully, "perhaps if we had some ice cream . . ."

There was a sound of brakes, and vehicles pulling up outside. Dixon ran swiftly along the landing, and I heard him trying to explain the situation through the window to the men outside. Presently he came back, accompanied by a fireman and his officer. When they looked down into the hall their eyes bulged.

"What we have to do is surround her without scaring her," Dixon was explaining.

"Surround *that?*" said the officer dubiously. "What in hell is it, anyway?"

"Never mind about that now," Dixon told him impatiently. "If we can just get a few ropes on to her from different directions —"

"Help!" shouted Alfred again. He flailed about violently. Una clasped him more closely to her carapace and chuckled dotingly. A peculiarly ghastly sound, I thought. It shook the firemen, too.

"For crysake —" one of them began.

"Hurry up," Dixon interrupted. "We can drop the first rope over her from here."

They both went back. The officer started shouting instructions to those below. He seemed to be having some difficulty in making himself clear. However, they both returned shortly with a coil of rope. And that fireman was good. He spun his noose gently and dropped it as neatly as you like. When he pulled in, it was round the carapace, below the arms so that it could not slip free. He belayed to the newel post at the top of the flight.

Una was still taken up with Alfred to the exclusion of everything else around her.

The front door opened quietly and the faces of a number of assorted firemen and cops appeared, all with their eyes popping and their jaws dropping. A moment later there was another bunch gaping into the hall from the sitting room door, too. One fireman stepped forward nervously and began to spin his rope. Unfortunately his cast touched a hanging light and fell short.

In that moment Una suddenly became aware of what went on.

"No!" she thundered. "He's mine! I want him!"

The terrified ropeman hurled himself back through the door on top of his companions, and it shut behind him. Without turning, Una started off in

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the same direction. Our rope tightened and we jumped aside. The newel post was snapped away like a stick and the rest of the rope went trailing after it. There was a forlorn cry from Alfred, still firmly clasped, but, luckily for him, on the side away from the line of progress. Then Una took the front door like a tank. There was an almighty crash, a shower of wood and plaster.

By the time we were able to reach the front windows Una was already clear of obstructions. We had an excellent view of her galloping down the drive at some ten miles an hour, towing, without apparent inconvenience, a half dozen or more firemen and cops who clung grimly to the trailing rope.

Down at the lodge, the guardian had had the presence of mind to close the gates. He dived for personal cover into the bushes while she was still some yards away. Gates, however, meant nothing to Una. Carefully shielding her precious Alfred with three arms, she went at them sideways. True, she staggered slightly at the impact, but they crumpled and went down before her. Alfred was waving his arms, and kicking out wildly; a faint wail for help floated back to us. The collection of constables and firemen was towed into the jumbled ironwork and left tangled there.

There was a sound of engines starting up below. Dixon called to them to wait. We pelted down the backstairs, and were able to fling ourselves upon the fire engine just as it moved off.

After a quarter mile the trail led off down a steep, still narrower lane to one side. We had to abandon the fire engine and follow on foot.

At the bottom, there is — was — an old packhorse bridge across the river. It sufficed, I believe, for several centuries of packhorses, but nothing like Una at full gallop had entered into its builders' calculations. By the time we reached it, the central span was missing, and a fireman was helping a dripping constable to carry the limp form of Alfred up the bank.

"Where is she?" Dixon demanded.

The fireman looked at him, then pointed silently to the middle of the river.

"A crane. Send for a crane, at once!" Dixon demanded. But everyone was more interested in emptying the water out of Alfred.

The experience has, I'm afraid, permanently altered that bonhomie which used to exist between Alfred and all dumb friends. In the forthcoming welter of claims, counter-claims, cross-claims, and civil and criminal charges in great variety, I shall be figuring only as a witness. But Alfred, who will, of course, appear in several capacities, says that when his charges of assault, abduction, attempted — well, there are several more on the list. When they have been met he intends to change his profession as he now finds it difficult to look a cow, or, indeed, any female animal, in the eye without a bias that tends to impair his judgment.

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With deadpan cogency Messrs. Pearson and Corwin argue that no matter how carefully you observe them, things are not what they seem and nothing is as ephemeral as a planet.

The Mask of Demeter

by MARTIN PEARSON *and* CECIL CORWIN

THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATION met once a year in New York City, which made it easy for members who lectured in Columbia or N.Y.U. Others had, often, to travel thousands of miles to partake of the delights that comprised the annual meetings. Among these delights were gratuitous insults, given and taken, violent challenges to debate which never came to anything, and — if it was a lucky year — a fist fight between two eminent figures in the realm of science.

The convention for 1951 wasn't getting anywhere, it seemed. There had been a number of papers read, a few desultory impeachments of fact with half-hearted rejoinders from the platform.

Next on the program was the good Dr. Brewster, astronomer from Vernier Tech. His topic was "Some Recent Observations and Correlations Regarding the Spectrum and Band-Shifts of Demeter," which was mysterious. Nobody could think for the moment of a star named Demeter, though there probably was one. If you look hard enough you could find a star with any name that comes to mind.

Dr. Brewster, with a slight cough, advanced on the stage, smiling. Not yet referring to his notes he began with the usual informal comments, intended to be humorous: "Well, gentlemen, I trust I can read a paper on Demeter without you all being scared out of your wits, eh?"

"Huh?" violently grunted a few of the members of the I.S.A.

"Now why should we be scared of anything *he* has to say?" demanded an astronomer from McGill University of a botanist from Yale.

Dr. Brewster chuckled mildly. "To wander a bit," he said, "I was one of those very few who read the original romance in its first edition. I found it vastly thrilling, of course — and totally improbable. But Orson Welles had — shall we say — a knack of putting over the totally improbable with a plausibility that is terrifying to the uninitiate."

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The botanist from Yale looked at the astronomer from McGill. "What's the man talking about?" he asked.

"Damme if I know," said the Canadian.

Dr. Brewster rapped for silence.

"In fact," said Dr. Brewster, "this whole business of invasion from Demeter has been badly overdone, I should say. There was a time when one could scarcely pick up a pulpwood magazine without finding a story about that theme. Not that I have anything against the pulps, gentlemen. They have done much to popularize astronomy in their own indirect way.

"To ramble a bit further, Mr. Bonestell, the cover painter, has done some very striking scenes of Demeter viewed from space — works which might well hang in the corridors of many an observatory building, I believe."

A large part of the audience looked uneasily at the other part. They read the science fiction pulps, but it was not considered proper to talk about them. "And furthermore," whispered the astronomer from McGill, "Bonestell has never done a Demeter cover that I know of — and I've seen practically everything he's done, from *Coronet* to *Conquest of Space*." He looked dazedly at Brewster, smiling from the lectern.

"Well," said Brewster briskly, "to get to the point, my observations were conducted until a very short time before the convention; since then I've been in seclusion — as it were — correlating them and whipping them into shape for this reading. An ambiguity I trust you will excuse; I had a bit of a shock lately, thought that I was quite finished as an astronomer. My eyes seemed to have failed me, but fortunately it was only temporary."

He rattled the papers and began to read off strings of figures. The astronomers in the audience twisted more and more uncomfortably in their seats.

Finally the gentleman from Canada rose and said, "Excuse me, Doctor Brewster, I'd like to ask a question."

"Certainly."

The Canadian looked a bit uncomfortable. "I'm ah — afraid I don't quite understand. You seem to be giving *atmospheric* spectrum readings."

"Exactly," said Brewster mildly.

"But how can you get detailed atmospheric readings from a star? And, by the way, just where is Demeter — in what constellation?"

Brewster opened his mouth and closed it again several times. At last he gasped, "I — I don't understand. I mean Demeter — *the* Demeter. It's the only one I know of."

"Well, where is it?" barked the baffled Canadian.

"Right where it always was, I presume," said Brewster loftily. "Between the orbits of Earth and Mars."

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"An asteroid?" asked the gentleman from McGill. "There is an asteroid named Demeter, but it isn't where *you* say it is and it's only a miserable score miles in diameter — anyone who says it has an atmosphere is a fool!"

"Hardly!" said Brewster, laying his paper down on the lectern. "That Demeter — if there is such a silly duplication of names — isn't the one *I* mean — and you know it! You don't call a planet two-thirds the size of Earth an asteroid, sir — whoever you are!"

"I," yelled the Canadian, "am Cullogh, associate professor of astronomy at McGill University."

"And I, Mr. Cullogh, am Brewster — *full* professor of astronomy at the Vernier Institute of Technology. If you will allow me to continue —" He stared at the Canadian until the man simply slumped into his seat.

Said the botanist from Yale, "Mr. Cullogh, I think you're quite right."

Cullogh stared at him. "I know I'm right. You can't pull planets out of your hat!" But Brewster, who seemed to have done just that, continued with his fantastic paper on a major planet that nobody had ever heard of.

There was a great deal of buzzing from the rear of the stage where the officers of the International Scientific Association were seated. Finally they rose in concert and advanced on Brewster.

"Excuse me, doctor," said the Vice President, laying a firm hand on the astronomer's shoulder.

"This session is adjourned," announced the President. "Reconvene at 8 promptly tonight for appointment of a publications committee. Please leave quietly without discussion."

The hall emptied in a few minutes and the Vice President unhanded Dr. Brewster, who sputtered incoherently for a few minutes, then pulled his dignity and his scattered typescript together. "Will you be good enough," he snarled, "to explain the meaning of this uncalled for interference with my dignity and reputation?"

"I don't think," said a brash young corresponding secretary, "that you have much of either left after reading that nightmare of yours. What's the idea? Doing an act to get some publicity?"

Dr. Brewster, with an animal snarl, lunged at the corresponding secretary, who hit him squarely on the jaw.

"You killed him!" gasped the President.

"Don't be foolish," said the secretary, rubbing his knuckles. "He'll come to." He propped the doctor up in a chair and massaged the back of his neck in the usual ringside manner. Dr. Brewster opened his eyes and worked his jaw, then burst into tears.

"There, there," said the Vice President. He went to the switchboard at

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the side of the stage and economically turned out the house lights, leaving on only the overhead borders.

Brewster sobbed. "What *is* the matter with everybody? I begin to read a paper about Demeter and you all jump on me!"

The officers looked blankly at one another. "What *was* that about Demeter?" asked the President. "I mean, what *is* it?"

The astronomer stopped weeping long enough to look wildly at the officer. "You're insane!" he shrilled. "Or you're railroading me!"

The Vice President took him by the arm, helping him to his feet. "When did you first hear of this Demeter?" he asked.

"*Hear* of it? It's one of the ten planets, man! It's one of the planets the Assyrians knew all about! You'll find it in all the astrological bushwah for the past thousand years! You can get its coördinates in any textbook. Kepler used it to calculate the elliptic orbit. Tycho Brahe measured its diameter. Aristotle swore up and down that if you slept in the light of Demeter you'd be cured of earache. Manly Hall, the occultist, says that Demeter governs the joints of the body. Shakespeare wrote a sonnet:

'So near are you to my thoughts as food to life
Or wandering Demeter to the velvet night
And for the peace of you I hold such strife
As cross-gartered gallant, gold-bedight—'".

The brash young corresponding secretary wrinkled his brow for a moment. "You have that all wrong," he finally observed. "It's Sonnet LXXV, and it goes like this:

'So are you to my thoughts as food to life,
Or as sweet-seasoned flowers are to the ground;
And for the peace of you I hold such strife
As twixt a miser and his wealth is found.'"

He grinned. "But your version sounds good too."

"But what," raved Brewster, "what about the invasion from Demeter that Orson Welles scared the country with in '39, that others have repeated in South America, in France more recently? What about that? And the book by H. G. Wells? And Edgar Rice Burroughs' famous series about John Carter, the Warlord of Demeter?"

"Both the radio play and the books were about the planet Mars," said the President.

"Let me see an ephemeris," asked Brewster weakly. The secretary handed him a copy of the Columbia University's current pamphlet of heavenly data. Brewster riffled through it eagerly.

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"Mercury, Venus, Luna — Mars!" he gasped. "They left Demeter out! How could Columbia University have done a thing like that?"

"We manage," said the President, offended. "I think, doctor, that you ought to go to a hospital for a little rest, eh?"

"Nothing of the sort," said Brewster. He was studying the ephemeris again. "Not only did they leave Demeter out," he said unhappily, "but Mars is altogether too near the Earth. Look at that — ridiculous!"

"That," said the President, "is where Mars has always been. You *do* need a rest, Brewster. I'm going to call for — ah — an auto." He went to the service phone in the wings of the stage. "Get me Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital," he said softly, shielding his mouth.

Brewster had slumped into a chair again and was holding his head in his hands. "I *saw* it," he muttered. "It was real after all. I *saw* it."

"You mean that Demeter of yours?" asked the corresponding secretary. "What does it look like?"

"It's blue, bright blue," said Brewster. "No moon. Look at the magazine covers — some of the *Astounding* paintings of the Forties are the best astronomical plates available on the subject. But I don't mean the planet. It was that hand."

"What hand?"

"You wouldn't believe me. I didn't believe it myself when I saw it. I thought my eyes were going back on me. That's why I knocked off work to do the correlation for my paper. I must have been the only one who saw it — the only telescope trained on Demeter at that precise time. A second off either way and I would have lost it."

"What the deuce are you talking about, doctor? Speak up!"

Brewster raved on. "You know how it is — direct observation through a telescope — you see things vaguely. Eye strain after a few minutes, and in a couple of hours you're nearly blind you're so intent on watching whatever particular point you're studying. I've often seen strange things through the telescopes. Chromatic aberration can put a rainbow across the Milky Way — surely you've seen that?"

They nodded gravely. Every astronomer has seen peculiar things through a telescope. A joke that goes around observatories tells of the greenhorn just out of school who polished a mirror objective glass with steel wool and discovered twenty new spiral nebulae.

"Well," babbled Brewster, "that's what I saw, sort of. One of those very firm constructions that drift across the field of vision — and when I saw it I'd been observing directly for five hours. So I knocked off right away. I don't want to go blind any more than the next man."

The President came back from the phone. "I've arranged for a — ah —

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cab to come for you, doctor," he explained. "What were you saying? Something about Demeter?"

"Yes. I haven't observed it or even looked through a telescope since then — when I saw that thing. It seemed to come from beyond the stars — through Magellan's coal sacks, like a port-hole."

"What was it that you saw?"

Instead of answering, he started up suddenly. "My God!" he yelled. "I nearly forgot about this!" He whipped a pamphlet bound in durable gray paper from his pocket. "I was using this very booklet when it happened. The pages almost got blurry for a moment — eye strain — but I kept it in focus just the same." He waved the pamphlet in the air. "Read this," he snarled. "And then you can laugh out of the other side of your mouth. I was checking it again just before I began to read my paper. It's still accurate."

The men from Bellevue came at that moment, big silent men in white jackets. The President whispered to one of them.

Not saying one word, the Bellevue men took Brewster by both arms and began to walk him off the stage. He seemed to accept them as natural forces rather than as human beings, for he neither struggled nor addressed them. He turned his head toward the officers standing on the stage. "What I saw," he yelled at them, "was a *hand*. It reached through Magellan's coal sacks and *took Demeter away*. It *took Demeter away! Took Demeter away . . .*" His voice died, echoing in the wings and flies of the bare stage.

"What did he give you?" asked the corresponding secretary.

The President glanced at the pamphlet bound in durable gray paper which Brewster had thrust into his hands. "It's the United States Naval Observatory Ephemeris for October 1949," he said.

He riffled through it casually. "Lists coördinates for that month. Celestial coördinates for Mercury, Venus, Luna," he muttered. Then he bent closer over the page, wild-eyed: "Mercury, Venus, Luna —

"*Demeter!*"

The President grabbed the Corresponding Secretary.

"Get him!" he croaked. "Get him!"

"Who?"

"Brewster, of course! He — ah, he was right! See, here — the coördinates of Demeter!"

He peered at the page while the Corresponding Secretary tried to look over his shoulder. The President gasped, closed his eyes and slid gently to the floor in a dead faint.

The Secretary picked up the book and found the proper page. For a moment the type seemed to blur a bit; but a closer look showed nothing more than the celestial coördinates of the nine planets everyone knows.

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For decades writers of science-fantasy were largely male and addressed themselves to an almost exclusively male audience; it's hardly surprising that the images of wish-fulfilling escape which they dreamed up had an exclusively male appeal. Idris Seabright feels that the time has come to abolish this single standard of wishful thinking. The calendar girls of deepest space offer no temptation to her, nor to the countless new readers of her sex who had recently discovered the field. So here is a fantasy into which women can gleefully escape — written with such typical Seabright charm that the staunchest male will want to follow them.

New Ritual

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

THE big white freezer purred away smoothly in the pantry. Marie Bates looked at it admiringly. It was really more company than Henry was, she thought — better-looking, more useful and it made soothing, companionable noises. She was ever so glad he had bought it. It had been a wonderful bargain.

She opened the freezer and dropped in the package of apricots she had just processed. The rest of the cots weren't ready yet, but she couldn't resist putting the new freezer to work at once. Frost was already forming on its side.

She went back into the kitchen and began scalding and blanching the other cots. She ought to be ashamed of herself for feeling that way about Henry, she supposed. He was a good husband, a good provider, and he had a lot on his mind — the farm, his lodge work, the new ritual. But . . .

Would he notice me, she thought suddenly, if I came out in the dining room with feathers in my hair, war paint on my face, and did a little war dance in my bloomers? She giggled at the picture. Wasn't she silly? She did get the craziest ideas!

She was putting the peeled and pitted apricots in the containers when Henry came in from the barn, where he had been pitching hay, for a drink of water. "Want to see my new freezer, Henry?" she asked brightly. "I got it at Fergus' sale with the egg money. It was real cheap." Sometimes she

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thought that if she just kept talking to Henry, he'd give in and start talking to her too. Even if he was a lot older than she was.

"Uh? No, not now." He pushed past her and started back to the barn. His short, stolid back retreated rapidly.

He wasn't angry, he wasn't annoyed, he wasn't anything. He just didn't notice her. Marie stared after him with eyes that were beginning to smart. It was like living with a clam. Wasn't there anything in the world he'd talk to her about? Not the farm or his lodge work or politics — she knew, she'd tried. Weren't there any other subjects? Food?

Well, once he'd said a pot roast of hers was good, and once he'd mentioned an angel cake. And when they were first married, years ago, he'd said that his mother had baked wonderful blueberry pies. That was quite a lot of talk on one subject, for Henry.

Blueberry pie. She went on filling the cots into the polyethylene bags. Well, that wasn't very helpful. Nobody in Ovid grew blueberries. The climate and the soil weren't right for them, and there wasn't moisture enough. She supposed there might be some canned blueberries in the store.

She filled the bags and sealed the cartons. She wrote "Apricots" and the date on the outside. How much easier fixing the cartons had been than canning would have been! No steamy kitchen, scalded fingers, nasty cracked jars. And fresh fruit in the wintertime would be a hundred percent better than canned. She wished Henry had let her talk about the freezer to him. Oh, well. She stacked the cartons on her forearm and went out to the pantry. She opened the deep freeze.

She halted, surprised. She'd put in the package of apricots herself not more than an hour and a half ago. She'd written "Apricots" on the outside. The package itself, a tiny object in the vast white reaches of the freezer, was just the same as it had been. But now the word "Blueberries" was neatly printed on the cardboard side.

Blueberries! What could have happened? Could she have written that herself by mistake? She was sure she hadn't. She couldn't! She hadn't even been thinking of blueberries. But that was what the carton said.

Cautiously Marie reached into the freezer and lifted the package out. It felt as hard as a rock. The contents must be frozen now. She stacked her load of cartons rather wobblingly on the edge of the freezer, and opened the package that said "Blueberries."

There were blueberries in it.

She could see them plain as plain through the transparent polyethylene wrapper. Blueberries! How on earth could they have got there?

One of the as yet unfrozen cartons of apricots, falling from the edge of the freezer with a thump, startled her. She dumped them hastily into the

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freezing compartment, shut the lid, and went back to the kitchen with her blueberries. She tore off the polyethylene wrapper and pried one of the blueberries from the frozen mass. After a little hesitation, she tasted it.

She'd had blueberries only once or twice before, but they'd had the same inky flavor as this one. They — Marie Bates hesitated no longer. She got out a mixing bowl, flour, salt, lard. She was going to make a pie.

Henry ate two pieces of the pie at supper. Marie watched anxiously, while he chomped stolidly away. At last she couldn't wait any longer. "How's the pie, Henry?" she asked, brushing at the crumbs on the tablecloth.

"Pie? Oh, O.K." He ran his tongue around his teeth. He sucked heavily against his upper plate.

She wanted to cry out, "But it's blueberry! You said — It's blueberry!" She didn't. Silently she picked up the dishes and went out to the kitchen with them. She wasn't going to cry over it, no, she wasn't. She was fierce with herself. Those blueberries hadn't cost her anything.

About 8 o'clock that night Bertha, her sister-in-law, dropped in. Bertha wore size 44 dresses from Sears Roebuck, but she wasn't very tall. Sometimes Marie liked her and sometimes she didn't. Tonight Bertha was being nice.

"Heard you got the freezer at Fergus' sale, Marie," she said after they had exchanged greetings. "Can I see it?"

"Oh, sure." Marie led her into the pantry and opened the freezer lid. She had a sudden stabbing fear, as it went up, that the freezer would be full of blueberries, but it wasn't. Nothing but apricots.

"It's a beauty," Bertha said appreciatively. "Nicest one I've ever seen. Listen, though, aren't you afraid to use it? Maybe Fergus kept some of his poison chemicals in it. I'd be nervous about it."

"That's silly," Marie answered. "People in Ovid were always prejudiced against Fergus. I guess he wasn't a very good inventor — I never heard of any of his inventions working or his making any money out of them — but he wouldn't have kept poisons in a freezer. There wouldn't have been any sense in it."

"Um. Well, you be careful, Marie. Fergus did blow his whole house up and kill himself. That freezer was about the only thing that was left. — Are you going to the church supper tomorrow night?"

"I don't think so. I haven't got anything to wear. I'm ashamed of my old blue rayon dress."

"Um." Bertha looked down at the linoleum. She moved one of her black kid oxfords as if she were embarrassed. "You know, Marie," she said without looking up, "Henry — well, he's funny in some ways. He doesn't say much, does he? He didn't, even when he was a kid. But he

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always liked pretty things. You know, Marie, I — I think Henry'd like it if you got a pretty new dress."

Bertha said good night. It was bedtime. Marie, upstairs, began to undress in the bathroom. She combed her hair, slipped into her nightgown. She decided to leave off her facial velvet cream tonight. She hesitated, and then touched her lips lightly with Venetian Rose lip pomade. Her lips did get so dry.

Henry was already in bed. She slid in beside him. He turned off the light.

For a moment there was silence. Then he turned on the light again. "Forgot to take out my teeth," he said in explanation. There was a sucking noise and then a click as he dropped his plates into the glass of water beside the bed. Once more he turned off the light.

Marie couldn't get to sleep. She thought, "He doesn't care about me, really. No matter what Bertha said." And then in a flood of bitterness, at the final personal devaluation, "Men are supposed to be selfish. They're supposed to think of just one thing. Henry — Henry never really wanted *anything* from me."

What was the use of thinking about it? He was her husband; she couldn't make him over. She'd better try to get some sleep. She sighed and moved her feet.

She rolled over. The position wasn't comfortable. She thought about the freezer, the blueberries, her old dress, what Bertha had said. She could have got a new dress, only she'd spent all her money on the freezer. The more she thought, the wider awake she got. She wished Henry wouldn't be so distant, she wished she had a pretty dress, she wished . . . Finally, a little before 12, she got out of bed.

Very softly she went to her closet. In the dark she fumbled over the three or four clothes hangers it contained. When she got the hanger with the blue rayon dress — she recognized it by the cotton lace around the neck — she drew it gently off the hanger. With the dress under one arm, she slipped out of the bedroom and down the stairs.

When she got to the freezer she hesitated. What she had in mind seemed suddenly foolish. In the light of the single bulb hanging from the ceiling, the white sides of the freezer looked coldly disapproving and impersonal. The idea she had about the freezer couldn't possibly be right. She felt so ashamed of her foolishness that she almost turned around and went back.

But . . . Well, it might be a silly idea, but there was nothing morally wrong about it. The worst that could happen would be that her dress might get a spot or two from the ice on the sides of the freezer. Suddenly resolute, she raised the lid and spread her old dress out full length on top of the packages of apricots.

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She turned the light out and tiptoed back up to the bedroom. Henry was still snoring; she hadn't bothered him at all. She slipped between the sheets cautiously. In ten minutes or so, she was asleep.

Marie didn't get a chance to look inside the freezer next morning until after the breakfast dishes were done and Henry had gone out. While she dried the last plates and put the forks in the drawer she kept telling herself not to be silly, nothing would have happened to her old dress. The blueberries had been a — a coincidence, that was all. Miracles just don't happen. She mustn't be silly.

But when she went out to the freezer, she was so weak with excitement that she could hardly lift the lid.

There was a long pink box lying on top of the apricots. There was no name on the box.

With fingers that trembled uncontrollably, Marie opened it. Inside there were sheets of carefully folded tissue paper. And under the tissue, carefully folded around more tissue, was a printed black and pink and gray silk dress.

It was the prettiest dress Marie had ever seen. The silk was as delicate to the touch as a caress, the colors were soft and subtle and rich. The neck — a V neck — was a little low, maybe, but it was surrounded by rows and rows of elegant self-fabric faggoting. And yet it wasn't too fancy a dress, or too elaborate, for her to wear.

For a moment Marie stood motionless, breathing deeply. Then she took the box in both arms and ran upstairs with it to the bedroom, where the mirror was. She was so excited that she did not even remember to close the freezer lid.

Oh, what a pretty dress! Her lips parted with pleasure as she looked in the glass. It fitted so nicely, the colors were so soft and becoming! She got up on a chair to look at the bottom part of it and even the hem line was just right. Marie thought, even when I was a young girl, I wasn't much to look at. In this dress I look prettier than I ever did. And my real age. Why, I'm only 33! That's not old. And yet I've been feeling like an old woman. If Henry likes pretty things. . . .

She decided to take a bath and wash her hair. Luckily she'd bought a bottle of shampoo from the Rawleigh man the last time he'd called. While she was waiting for the water to heat, she went out and fed the chickens and collected the eggs. She had always rather disliked poultry, they made such silly noises and had such fussy ways, but now she looked at them cheerfully. If it hadn't been for her egg money, she'd never have been able to buy the wonderful freezer at Fergus' sale.

She washed her hair and pushed a wave into the damp, fresh locks.

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While it was drying, she planned her campaign. She'd have something or other for lunch — it didn't much matter what — but for supper she'd get a really nice meal. Chicken and slaw and butterbeans and the rest of the blueberry pie. She'd wear her lovely new dress and fluff her hair out around her face so the gray didn't show. She had powder and rouge, though she didn't use them much, and even a bottle of Avon cologne. If Bertha had been right about Henry . . . Marie felt a sick, excited feeling in the pit of her stomach, half guilty, half agreeable. She had to keep swallowing over it.

She and Henry ate lunch in silence. Henry had a copy of the new lodge ritual beside his plate. He kept it open with his knife, and studied it while he ate. After lunch Marie did her ironing and shaped the butter from yesterday's churning — they had only one cow — into pats. About 4 she started on supper. Then she got dressed.

Henry was sitting in the living room when she went in. He'd washed up; he was reading the new ritual. She said, "Supper's ready, Henry." And then, with a great effort, "What do you think of my new dress?"

He raised his eyes. His mouth opened in a surprise which, even at the moment, Marie found not quite flattering. "Why, Marie!" he said. He smiled a little. "Marie, you're as pretty as a picture in that dress!"

He got up from his chair and started toward her. She waited for his approach in a dazzle of happiness. He put his arm around her. He leaned forward to kiss her on the cheek. Marie perceived, with an almost apocalyptic horror, that he wasn't wearing his teeth.

When the kiss was over, she went back to the kitchen. She began to pick up pieces of chicken from the skillet and put them on the platter. She found she was crying. She tried to push the tears back with her wrists. It didn't help. The tears still came.

For — and this was the heart of the matter, the root of the trouble, the thing that never could be altered — Henry was still Henry Bates. He might talk to her, smile at her, kiss her, be interested in her. What of it? He would still be two inches shorter than she was, years older, and bald on the top of his head. He would still forget to wear his teeth. Those darned old false teeth!

She'd got to stop. Henry would think she was crazy. She fumbled with the platter and then put it down again. Standing there among the wreck of her hopes, her cheeks shining damply and tears dripping on the neck of her dress, she heard the motor of the freezer in the pantry begin to purr.

For a moment she listened to the sound without moving. Then she raised her head.

Henry looked up at her with a puzzled frown when she went into the

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living room. "Something's wrong with the freezer, Henry," she said, avoiding his eyes. "Won't you see if you can fix it for me? And we'll eat."

He got up. He followed her into the pantry. "Why, the motor's running," he said in a puzzled voice. He bent over the freezer's open lid.

Marie hesitated for a moment. Her heart was thumping wildly. She was afraid he'd hear it. She hoped, oh, she hoped, this was the right thing to do. She caught her husband by the seat of the pants and dumped him into the big white chest.

She slammed the lid of the freezer shut and sat down on it.

For a while there were sounds of struggle. Henry thumped, heaved, beat on the sides of the chest. Marie, with tears running down her cheeks, remained seated on the lid. She noticed that from time to time the freezer motor made a sort of spitting noise, as if it might be over-exerting itself.

At the end of two hours she raised the freezer lid.

The Bates's absence was not noticed for several days. It was not until Bertha, wanting to borrow Marie's apron pattern, called three times at the house without finding anyone at home, that she grew alarmed. Then she called the sheriff and they broke into the house.

They searched it. They found nothing — no bodies, no disorder, no farewell notes.

After a decent length of time had passed, Bertha and her husband took over the farm. Bertha was Henry Bates's nearest relative and nobody dreamed of disputing her right to it. Besides, it didn't amount to much.

Bertha was disappointed that she never could get the freezer to work. The electrician she called in said he couldn't understand it. The motor seemed to have burned itself out.

One day late that year the mailman brought Bertha a postcard. It was a glossy photograph of a man and woman on skis against a winter background and, except that the man was taller and both he and the woman much younger and better looking than the missing couple, the pair in the picture bore a remarkable resemblance to Marie and Henry Bates. Neither of them looked a day over 30. They wore expensive ski clothing and both of them were wreathed in smiles. The postmark on the card was Sun Valley, Idaho.

Bertha turned the card over and over, frowning and trying to make sense out of it. She felt that something had happened, but she didn't know quite what. She hovered on the edge of wild surmise. Finally she put the card away in the upper drawer of the sideboard and stopped thinking about it. There wasn't any use in thinking. There was no message on the card's back.

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BUREAU OF ENGLISH MATRICULATION

(Note: *In this department we hope to present, from time to time, the work of authors who have markedly influenced the course of fantasy or science fiction in other lands, yet who have never been translated into English. Our readers who know important untranslated works are invited, and even urged, to send in nominations.*)

One of the most significant and influential science fiction novels in the world is, peculiarly, unknown to the English-reading public: Kurd Lasswitz's AUF ZWEI PLANETEN (ON TWO PLANETS). *This pioneering work of 1897 was in part a political Utopia (it was banned by the Nazis as* demokratisch), *but in large part a provocative piece of original thinking on spaceflight, including the first satellite launching station and the first plausible working-out of interplanetary gravitational orbits. These and other concepts profoundly affected the succeeding generations of German scientists; it is not too much to say that a direct line of influence leads from* AUF ZWEI PLANETEN *to Peenemünde. Lasswitz (1848–1910) spent most of his life as a professor at the Gymnasium Ernestinum in Gotha (a* gymnasium *being something more than a high school and less than a University), publishing learned works on philosophy and physics — and constantly amusing himself by writing science fiction and fantasy, to a total, in addition to his masterwork, of three novels and two large collections of short stories, some written as early as 1869. In many of these stories he follows the curious precedent set by astronomer Kepler in* SOMNIUM, *embodying the most serious scientific thinking, often daringly imaginative for its time, within a lighthearted fantasy framework, quite devoid of any suggestion of the Prussian* Herr Professor und Hofrath (*Court Counselor*) *which he was. Despite his popularity not only in German but in almost every language of Europe, not a single word of Lasswitz has ever appeared before in English. Now we are proud to present this humorous, absurd, yet seriously thoughtful story, originally written in 1895, as the first in a series from the most suitable of all translators — the man who has played so large a part in fulfilling the Lasswitz prophecies, Willy Ley.*

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When the Devil Took the Professor

by KURD LASSWITZ

translated by Willy Ley

"BUT CERTAINLY HE TOOK ME," said the Professor, looking lovingly at the white ash of his enormous Havana. "He did. Literally and in person."

"I've seen that coming for years," laughed the Fat Man.

"Who did and what?" asked the Lady in Blue.

"Didn't you pay any attention?" Little Mrs. Broesen was quite impatient. "The devil took the professor."

"But there he sits," the Lady in Blue insisted.

"That's because he took him alive and couldn't digest him," the Fat Man explained.

"I still don't understand."

"Please tell us, Herr Professor."

"Well," (the Professor took a puff first) "it was on Saturday last week. I was sitting at my desk in the evening hours, as usual. Somebody knocked at the door and I called 'come in'; but please don't be frightened now . . ."

"I don't want to hear anything awful," said the Lady in Blue, clapping her hands to her ears, but not too tightly.

"Well, it *was* awful and I was not a little startled at first. Suddenly somebody was standing in the middle of the room, right under the ceiling lights, and I could see him clearly."

"Did he have fiery eyes? Was he clad in a red greatcoat?"

"No, ordinary clothing, with gold-rimmed spectacles and graying hair. Almost *gemütlich*-looking, but the terrible thing was . . ."

"The goat's leg? The forked tail?"

"No, he looked precisely the way I do. Of course, I thought of hallucinations and kept quiet. Then my doppelgänger said: 'I am truly sorry, Herr Professor, but you must come with me. I have decided.' — 'What do you mean, I have to come with you?' I said. 'I'm not a medical man if that's what you think and I am also quite busy.' 'I know who and what you are, and you do have to come with me. I'm the devil.'

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"I must have been prettily taken aback," continued the Professor, "and I said, 'You the devil? But you look like me!' — 'You'll have to pardon that,' the devil told me. 'When I come to take you I have to have this, your, appearance. Everybody is his own devil. But now quit stalling and come along.' — 'Where to?' I asked. 'I'll have you know that I don't believe either in Hell or in the devil in the customary meanings of those words.' — 'You don't have to; I take everybody in the manner in which *he* pictures his world. You, for example, will join me on a nice long trip into space. I know you love to travel to the stars.' — 'Yes, but only figuratively; right here at my desk. Nor do I feel like taking a trip right now. Besides I would have to pack my things first.' — 'Not necessary; after all, trips in my company are not supposed to be pleasure cruises. For you the trip will be a hundred thousand million million kilometers long, or 10^{17} kilometers, if you like that better. I consider this the proper figure for you.' — 'And afterwards?' — 'Afterwards we'll see. Maybe I will make you into a nice meteorite or marry you to a Martian female for a thousand years — *Martian* years!'

"Well, I told him that I would not go and that I had several pieces of research to finish up. He became insistent and I finally said that even if he took me I'd continue to exist in the Earth Soul. Then the devil grew angry; obviously he did not like theoretical discussions. 'I'll take that Earth Soul too one day,' he said."

"The Earth Soul? What's that?" the Lady in Blue interrupted the Professor.

"Please don't interrupt!" said Mrs. Broesen. "The Professor lectured on that theme only a month ago."

"I couldn't come that night. My maid . . ."

"All right, look it up in Fechner's works," said the Fat Man. The Quiet Young Man who had not said anything so far opened his mouth, but then closed it again.

"I was trying to stall some more," the Professor said, "but all of a sudden I found myself in a soft double seat, right next to the devil. My feet were on a foot rest and there was a kind of handrail to hold on to. But otherwise we were freely suspended in space. I decided that I would not let the devil impress me in any way. I felt certain that he had weak points and I have always maintained that Dr. Faustus, if only he had been a better mathematician, could have won his particular case without trouble. 'Well, Professor,' the devil said, 'how do you like my little spaceship? Made in one piece of the ideal material you once thought up, completely transparent and of infinite structural strength. You'll have a beautiful view.'

"I looked around. Behind us there was night, absolute blackness. Above and below, to the right and to the left, there were a number of stars which

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became more and more densely packed in front. Directly ahead they coalesced into a bright glow. I did not understand that phenomenon. Precisely where were we? I came to the conclusion that I had been unconscious for some time and asked for how long we had been travelling. The devil told me that it had been for about half an hour and, as I had suspected, that he had had to make me unconscious to get me out of my study and into this vehicle. 'You have never seen a sight like that, have you?' he said maliciously. 'Oh,' I replied, 'I'm quite sure that this can be explained. Just tell me at what speed we are traveling.' 'Just about ten times the speed of light,' he answered."

"Hohoho," the Fat Man shook with laughter. "Ten times the speed of light! It would need the devil to do that."

"It did," the Professor said matter-of-factly. "I quickly thought this over. At ten times the speed of light we must have traversed an astronomical unit in about 50 seconds. The distance to Neptune is in round figures 30 astronomical units. I remarked that we had to be quite some distance from the solar system as a whole under these circumstances and the devil agreed. Then I understood why there was this black night at our back. Since we moved so much faster than the light waves they could not catch up with us and it was dark. The light rays from the sides were intercepted and we could see them. But the bright glow ahead? Because we moved so fast in the opposite direction to the rays meeting us, even the longest visible rays, those of red light, had to be shortened so much that they were shorter by far than ultraviolet. They should not be visible at all. It should have been totally dark in front too, if for a different reason.

"The devil, of course, read my thoughts, or so it seemed because he looked at me, grinned, and said, 'Well, my dear Professor, that glow ahead is something you don't seem to be able to understand.' It was just at that moment that I did understand and I said, 'This is elementary. What is visible ahead is not light as we usually see it. These are rays which are normally far too long to be visible to the human eye. They must be either long heat rays or more likely electric waves which are sufficiently foreshortened by our speed so that my eye accepts them as visible radiation. This is a beautiful proof that the stars emit many long-wave rays which we have never been able to detect directly.'

"The devil grumbled; he was angry that I had been right. But then he crinkled his nose and pulled his mouth wide, just as I do when I ask a difficult question of one of my students — it was awful how much he looked like me — and said, 'If this light inconveniences you, my dear Professor, I can stop it. I have here a screen which is impervious to radiation of any wavelength. See, I turn it around, like this; now no radiation coming from

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the front can strike your eyes — but look, there is still some light.' — 'Much weaker now,' I replied. 'Yes,' said the devil. 'Much weaker indeed, but where does it come from? Tell me that.'

"I was taken aback. Was the devil cheating? Did his screen permit a certain wavelength to pass? No, in that case the picture should have been similar to the first, if much weaker. But the distribution of the stars was entirely different and the bright central glow had completely disappeared. The light could not come from the stars ahead. Or was this a mirror? I turned around; no, it was still dark behind us. The devil grinned and I grew almost frantic. I could not permit him to win out in a theoretical debate. Only the Lord knew what rights he would acquire if he could best me. The light could only come from behind even though we were traveling faster than light by far.

" 'Well, my dear Herr Professor?' the devil prompted me with nasty joviality. 'Of course I can explain that,' I said. 'These are light rays which we are overtaking — that's why they appear to come from the front. But since our own movement will increase the wavelength as far as we are concerned, these are again rays which are normally invisible. Only this time they are the very short rays, like ultraviolet. Of course they were there even before you turned your screen but were not discernible because of the stronger glow from the front.' The devil did not like it. 'Any conclusions from this observation?' he said.

" 'Yes', I said. 'If we did not move quite so fast and if I had an instrument with which to observe the earth I would see events running backwards.' The devil made a motion. 'All right; I have reduced the speed, and while you could not build such an instrument it's really simple for me. Here it is.' He handed me something like a small telescope and I could see our street, even read the number of the house. But it was hard to understand what I saw because things did seem to happen backwards. I finally solved my problem by closing my eyes and opening them only for short instants at regular intervals. That way I got a sequence of still pictures which I could easily arrange in proper sequence in my mind.

"I was just seeing something interesting . . ."

"Did it have anything to do with me?" the Lady in Blue asked.

". . . when the devil took the glass away from me and said, 'How do you explain this little instrument, my dear Professor?'

" 'I don't have to,' I replied. 'You can expect scientific explanations from me, but your glass is obviously an invention of the devil — that is to say, some devilish trick which has nothing in common with the natural sciences. You would have to prove first that it is a bona fide optical instrument before you could expect an exposition of theory.' The devil said something which

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sounded like 'damn you,' but I pretended not to hear. Then he continued: 'But the fact that we move with ten times the speed of light (I have just restored that rate), this is something you must be able to explain. I take that to be a technological problem and if you don't know the answer I don't have to waste any more time on you. After all I am not obliged to chauffeur you for 10^{17} kilometers; I can throw you out right now and then you'll be a meteorite.'

"This was dangerous. I thought as I have never thought before and I never want to think that hard again. Fortunately I have also studied philosophy. I decided to treat it as abstractly as I could. The devil yelled at me; he was sure that he had won. 'Quit stalling!' he bellowed. 'You realize,' I told him, 'that there are two explanations: one if you take this to be a problem in psychology and another one if you accept it as a problem in metaphysics. If it is a psychological problem, you are merely my own dream-image.' The devil made a movement as if he wanted to throw me out into space and I talked fast: 'That won't help you, that wouldn't prove a thing. Because if you are merely my dream-image your throwing me into space would be just a part of the same dream and in the end I'd wake up, probably having fallen asleep at my desk.' 'You *are* awake!' screamed the devil. 'I think so too,' I said, 'for if this should turn out to be a dream it would be a rather trite device, don't you think? Been used over and over again.' — 'Well, go on then.' — 'All right. Let's review it as a problem in metaphysics. There are then two explanations, one more in the field of natural philosophy, the other more in the field of ethics.'

" 'Sir!' the devil shouted at me. 'You can drive *me* crazy! I don't want two explanations; I want the right one.' — 'But your question of how we can move so fast covers two different problems. I could ask, How does he get all the energy that is needed for this velocity? Or I could ask, Where does he come from himself?'

"The devil looked at me in a manner which made me ashamed; I had never believed that there could be such a stupid look on my face. 'You have no right to ask anything,' he said after a while; '*I* ask the questions around here.' — 'But would you kindly permit me just one question?' I said as politely as possible. 'And that one merely to avoid unnecessary elaborations on my part?' — 'This I'll grant,' he said quite gently; 'one question and I'll answer it. But that's the last, or else . . .'

" 'Can you work *miracles?*'

"The change in the devil's appearance was almost pathetic. He did not look like me anymore, he looked like a very unhappy man, or like a great lord of much power who has suddenly fainted and is ashamed of this lapse. 'What do you mean by that question? I cannot *create* anything.' — 'I mean,'

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I said, 'could you cause sudden changes in the distribution of matter and of energy which would be inexplicable?' He laughed. 'Inexplicable to you? That would be worth a lot! You don't know anything. You are finite spirits and helpless when it comes to the infinite. But I can reach into the infinite where there are endless world systems with endless varieties of energy and I could move things into your puny galaxy which would make your hairs stand on end.'

" 'Ahem,' I said. 'So you simply took the energy you needed from an infinitely distant stellar system?' — 'Not quite, but almost. It does not come from a very distant system but from a place which you cannot even comprehend.' — 'Well, then, the thing has been explained. The only question left is why you did it at all. I'll permit myself to observe that you have done something quite foolish.' The devil jumped up and sparks literally flew from his eyes; I rued my words. 'You worm!' he thundered. 'How dare you judge the actions of Infinite Spirits. I'd crush you if . . . well, if you were not right.' He became silent and I felt that I did not have much to fear. As long as I was right nothing could happen to me, it seemed. I believed that I understood the situation: no matter how much power was vested in the devil, there was one thing more powerful, namely reason. But that did not help me much. How could I get out of the spot I was in? I did not want to travel through space for years. But I had no right to ask more questions."

The Quiet Young Man sighed deeply in sympathy and took a careful sip from the glass of lemonade in front of him. The Professor got his cigar going again and continued:

" 'You said,' I began carefully, 'that I should not judge the actions of Infinite Spirits. That sounds as if there were more than one.' — 'Just two,' the devil said with a tired voice. 'I am one and I don't like to discuss the other.' — 'Hm, the other one . . .' — 'Keep quiet!' he interrupted me. — 'I only wanted to say,' I went on, 'that he could also reach into the infinite and produce great miracles.' — 'No!' yelled the devil, furious again. 'He doesn't do that. He doesn't have to. He is Reason himself. He has arranged everything so that it runs by itself. He makes no mistakes and therefore He needs no miracles to correct His mistakes. That is what's wrong with me!'

" 'Ah so . . . In short you have power, but not the power of reason.' — 'Yes, Professor, right again. My lot is to make all the mistakes in the universe. But it doesn't get me anywhere, reason always corrects everything I do. My acts of unreason simply perish because they *are* unreason. But' — he brightened a bit — 'at least I have all infinity at my disposal. Even though the mistakes I make are always automatically straightened out, I

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can always make more mistakes. You have no idea how much disorder I have initiated with just this little trip.' — 'I still think you could have done something more spectacular. Why don't you blow up the earth? Why don't you squeeze the whole galaxy into one lump of star matter?' — 'Useless,' said the devil, 'useless like everything else. What does it signify how matter and energy are distributed in the universe? There is so much of it that the ruination of a galaxy would hardly be noticed. No, I can do better by taking a philosopher, like you. That will cause some damage to reason itself, I hope.'

" 'Most flattering! But why didn't you take people like Socrates, Galilei and Kant?' — 'I did, I did. If you remember your history you know that I got them into trouble with the authorities. Unfortunately I was late on many occasions. . . . Since you won't get back [*ouch!* I thought] I might as well say this aloud for once. I have the power; but it is worthless, because space is infinite. That's the basic trouble. If I should feel like changing the Milky Way into Bavarian beer I can do that. But it would still be in space and the Other One can change it back into suns, planets and moons.'

" 'But if,' I said, 'space were *not* infinite? If space curved back into itself . . .' 'Yes, if!' the devil laughed aloud. '*If* it were something like a large round box, you could stay inside and run in circles, but you could also throw things out of it.' "

"I am so happy," the Quiet Young Man said suddenly, "that the devil cannot really do anything, not even with Bavarian beer."

The Professor threw him a surprised glance. "Don't be happy too soon," he said.

"But beer is one of the devil's inventions. I always thought alcohol was his most important tool."

"The devil does not agree with you there. I know, for we talked about it. I had a plan forming in my mind and in order to gain time to think about it I steered the discussion in the direction of some of the minor things the devil might do. And he told me that he, on earth, is greatly concerned with the furtherance of the Temperance Leagues. Yes, he admitted, a number of people drink themselves to death and become his prey. But not many and mostly those he'd get anyway. But anti-alcoholism, once it has taken hold as a habit, will tend to preserve the weak-willed too . . ."

"But some alcoholics . . ."

"Please, I am only repeating what the devil told me. He maintains that, if nobody takes a drink anymore, the human race will wipe itself out in about three generations, mostly by way of digestive disorders. That is why he, in many disguises, is the benefactor of many Temperance organizations."

"Herr Professor!" the Quiet Young Man said with a sigh, while the Fat

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Man finished his beer and the Lady in Blue asked for a glass of wine.

"Please go on now and tell us just how you got rid of the devil."

"With pleasure," said the Professor. "As you must have gathered we had started talking generally and I asked the devil just how he stopped his spaceship. 'Hoho!' he cried. 'Do you really think I'll tell you that? Reveal the manipulation of the infinite vector to a mortal? You couldn't understand it even if I wanted to explain. I merely move my hands, like this, then like that, and then I'd do something else and we'd obtain whatever energy we need.' — 'You mean,' I asked, 'that we could travel still faster?' — 'Of course, a thousand times as fast as light, or a million times.' — 'That,' I said, 'I don't believe.' — 'Sir!' — 'Beg pardon, but not 20,000,000 times as fast as light?' — 'I'll show you! But then leave me in peace; I don't intend to keep talking to you all the time.'

"The devil moved his hands strangely, or one of them because he held me with the other. I could see that we had attained an incredible speed: the star systems to our sides receded rapidly, and I figured out that we moved about six million million kilometers per second, a little more than half a light year per second. Right after that the devil went to sleep."

The Professor paused to light another cigar.

"Just a moment," the Fat Man said. "I can believe the limitless energy, what with radium and all the things we don't know. But that the devil should need sleep like any of us, that is a bit hard to take."

"Yes," the Professor grinned openly. "I was sure he did not sleep. I reasoned that he probably had other things to do but that he did not want to leave me unsupervised. So he made whatever he left behind appear to be sleeping, but I was sure that it was a kind of reporting device which would call him the instant I started meddling with the machinery."

"But why did you ask for this high speed, Herr Professor?" said Mrs. Broesen. "I've been wondering about that. If I understood you correctly you were to travel, oh some awful distance and the real punishment was to come after that. If I had been you I would have asked for the lowest speed the devil would permit."

"But I wanted to get home quickly because of my unfinished work. To do that I had to fly as fast as possible, in a straight line."

"I still don't understand," Mrs. Broesen insisted. "Couldn't you explain this a little more clearly?"

"Suppose that you traveled due West from here in a straight line. Since the earth is a sphere you would, in the end, return to this city, coming from the East."

"I know that much myself. But the galaxy is not a sphere and you did not travel at its surface."

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"No, but space itself is curved; we just don't notice it. Formerly people also thought that the earth was flat. Now we all know better. As for space, some mathematicians have suspected for quite some time that it *might* be curved. They could not prove it, they could just say that it might be so without changing the laws of logical thought. Well, I succeeded in discovering that space *is* curved. The devil did not know that because my paper hasn't been published yet. I also calculated the radius of curvature; in short our space is not a Euclidean space but what I call an elliptical space, and its radius of curvature is 3000 light years, so that light needs somewhat over 10,000 years to return to the point of origin."

"In that case," the Fat Man said, "we should see two suns in the sky, the second sun being the light rays that have traveled around once. But there is no counter-sun."

"There would be one," the Professor retorted, "there would be one if there were less dust in space. But there is so much dust that even the most powerful sun cannot shine all the way around. We can't see that far and the devil can't either. The proof is, after all, that I did travel all the way around!"

"In a straight line?" the Fat Man said.

"In a straight line! But let me go on with my story. While the devil had this apparently sleeping thing next to me which, as I said, I suspected of being a reporting device, I did not dare to move. So I sat for four hours. I wondered whether we would get even somewhere near our solar system. I worried that we would simply overshoot it, since I could not stop the space ship. Even if I had known how, I would not have known when to do it; at that speed one could not possibly recognize any constellations. I grew hungry and thirsty for I had nothing to eat or to drink, not even a cigar to smoke. I just sat, motionless, worrying."

"I feel really sorry for you," said the Lady in Blue.

"I felt sorry for myself. Of course I saw fantastic things, wisps of light dissolved into starry skies and then condensed again into glittering clouds. But I sat hour after hour near the sleeping devil and debated whether I should call him. Then all of a sudden I felt my seat disappear from under me, but some counterforce kept me in the cabin. I realized at once that the stars were standing still and that the yellowish star ahead might even be our own sun. The devil came to at the same instant. He said that he had not really intended to maintain the 20,000,000 times light velocity and finish the trip in just five hours. At that moment a new fear struck me. The devil had spoken as if he were unaware of the curvature of space. But the length of the trip which he had decreed for me was almost precisely what I had calculated to be the 'circumference' of our space.

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"But while I was thinking that, I heard him talk to nobody in particular: 'Just where in the universe are we now? I can't understand that. We are back in the solar system, quite near the orbit of Neptune. But we left on the other side. If the ship had deviated from the straight line I'd have known it at once.' I then realized that he really did not know. Whether the agreement between his and my figures was pure coincidence or whether it had deeper reasons not known to either of us was unimportant, the devil still took space to be infinite.

" 'If you'll permit me,' I said, 'I'll explain this to you. I hope that you then will . . .' — 'No, I won't!' he said sharply. 'The trip is over and now I'll do with you as I please. But I can listen to the explanation first.' — 'Ahem,' I said. For once I did not like explaining something. 'You simply made a mistake in assuming that space is infinite. Our mathematicians have known for a long time that an infinity of types of space is possible. They just could not prove which of the possible types applied to our own space. But now we have traveled 10^{17} kilometers in a straight line and we are back about where we started. This should convince you that our space is *finite*. *I* have known that for a long time.'

"The devil was perfectly quiet for quite a while. Then he said: 'What, our space is actually curved? Which means that it is not infinite? And I never realized that? Of course I have never made such a long trip at such speed. But if — well, if that is really so, maybe the Other One doesn't know it either. That proves that Reason itself is mistaken! But then *I* have won. Then the law of the conservation of matter and energy is nonsense. I can destroy by throwing things out of space. Well, well, what no god and no devil ever even suspected has been found by a Professor!'

"I did feel quite ashamed, but then I said, 'Would you now consider . . .?' — 'Of course, of course, I'll bring you back to earth immediately!' "

"Hohoho!" the Fat Man laughed loud and long. "You have been had! Do you really think you are better off here?"

The Professor remained silent, just nodding his head. Then he reached for his glass and another cigar.

"Well, and then? What came then?" Mrs. Broesen wanted to know.

"That was the last I heard of the devil. I found myself in my study. The clock said 2:25 A.M. Sunday. I was dead tired and went to bed at once."

"But, Herr Professor," said the Lady in Blue, "is this story really true?"

"Of course it is, every word of it."

"*Prosit, Professor!*" said the Fat Man. The Quiet Young Man switched from lemonade to ice water, opened his mouth and closed it again. And the Lady in Blue remarked, "Well, anyway, it was nice of the devil to bring you back."

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As background to his story Bruce Elliott, himself a topflight magician and an able amateur of topology, envisions a glum future, a time when the grand old guild of illusionists and prestidigitators is down to its last active member. And, although this one is a megalomaniacal scoundrel, we addicts of the impossible escape and the beautiful-lady-sawed-in-two can't help admiring his efforts to compete with interplanetary TV. Even so, genius does not justify villainy and the nimblest legerdemain will not prevail against the inexorable laws of justice . . . and topology.

The Last Magician

by BRUCE ELLIOTT

He was the last one. I guess there's always something interesting about the last anything. The last dinosaur, the last auto, the last gas-powered plane, yes, he fits right into that museum of last things. He was the last magician.

He was good, too. I've seen the old celluloids of the great ones of the past, Houdini, Blackstone and Thurston, and he was like all of them rolled into one and more, much more. They functioned in a time when people still had a hankering to believe that there was such a thing as magic but he burst forth in our time like a nova. He revived interest in his hanky panky art and he scared the hell out of people. He may have been a charlatan and paranoid and all the other things they called him but he sure walloped the bejesus out of an audience and that's something very few performers do these days.

I never knew why he chose the place he did for his debut except that it was good publicity-wise and that was something that he knew all about. He could sure pick his shots when it came to attracting public attention.

You know what vaudeville has become in our time, an intellectual's plaything, a cult for the avant garde. These vaudemanés sit and talk about tap dancers that were great hundreds of years ago and discuss crosstalk comics, whatever they were, and in general sit and drool about their dear, dear, dying art form.

I don't know much about art forms and I have a sneaking feeling that anything that can't support itself by public interest doesn't amount to much. Certainly vaudeville would be nonexistent if it wasn't subsidized by

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these cultists. But I made my living cooking up props for these phoney shows and that was good enough for me. Until I joined Duneen as a prop man I had always worked with my hands and you know that means I'm good because you have to be better than a machine to get a license to work with your hands today.

But I was telling you about Duneen. He walked out on the little stage where we put on our "vaudevilles," completely unannounced. His appearance sure made everyone sit up and take notice. Heaven knows where he got his outfit because it was a real costume piece. Black cape swirling around his tall, lean frame; a curious kind of butterfly-shaped thing at his neck that was surrounded with a high white band, a completely non-functional jacket that was cut away in the front and dropped down like tails in the rear and a shirt that looked as if it was made of some stiff plastic. It would have looked funny on anyone else but it didn't on him.

I suppose the hair he had on his lip and chin was fake because all males have their face hair extirpated at puberty now, but I never saw him without it. He called the hair a mustache and goatee and it did strange things to his hollow cheeked face.

He walked out to the center of the stage and bowed obsequiously to the handful of avant gardists that made up the audience. But somehow, even the bow, even the mock humility was an insult. It was as though he was just pretending to be humble because he knew he was superior. He could get under your skin like that in a million ways but I didn't learn that till later.

I could hear a little rustle in the audience as they looked through their programs trying to figure out who Duneen was. They didn't have much time for that though, because as he bowed he swept off his cape and gracefully showed both sides of it.

His curious lip-tilted grimace that was halfway between a smile and a sneer appeared as he draped the cape over his arm. Suddenly there was a form under it. When he whipped the cloth away a Martian girl, naked, stood shyly revealed. Duneen looked at the audience out of the corners of his eyes as though trying to gauge the effect and then plucked a wand out of the air. This is a long black stick with white tips. It is an adjunct that old time magicians always used.

Gesturing at the girl with the "wand" he then snapped his fingers. Suddenly a brassiere appeared clothing her breasts. Another snap of those long, thin fingers and her legs and thighs were covered. Then he gestured around her with the "wand" and she was fully dressed. The cloth seemed to come from nowhere, seemed to be produced at the tip of the "wand."

From then on she assisted him as you have seen her do on TV. The only

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reason I'm telling you about this first opening is that they never let him repeat it on the air. The Martian ambassador complained and there was some kind of a stink; I don't know what it was all about, but Duneen never started his show that way again.

You remember the rest of his act, of course; the sawing of the Martian girl in half with a G-ray and her restoration after you would have sworn she was dead. The way he would cause her to vanish from an hermetically sealed rocket blast tube and the way he produced her from a previously shown empty Liane lizard shell. All these things became household words and that was just the trouble.

Just because he was the last of the magicians, just because he had such a terrific effect on show business, he had to keep topping himself. He had to keep inventing newer and more amazing tricks and it almost drove him crazy.

Then there was the other reason which had been true since the beginning of TV. TV is a bottomless maw into which entertainment is shoveled only to vanish like one of Duneen's tricks. Centuries ago, when the TV audience was just made up of millions of people, you could repeat yourself once in a while, I suppose, and figure that not everyone had caught you the first time. But now, when the audience is up in the hundreds of millions, the problem has become so bad that lots of performers crack under the strain.

The old time magicians used to meet their audiences bit by bit through the years and if there was any overlapping it didn't matter very much. But now, today, you meet all the people in the world with one performance.

I've read in the old magic text books that magicians could, and did, do the same tricks over and over for the length of their professional careers. Imagine that!

But Duneen, of course, could never repeat himself, even once. He had to keep inventing more and more exciting variations on his basic tricks.

That was where I came in, me and my capable hands. I guess maybe I wouldn't have helped him if it hadn't been for Aydah, his Martian girl assistant — but I felt sorry for her. He was nasty to her most of the time, but he was at his worst when he was wracking his brain trying to cook up a new pseudo-miracle.

I heard her crying one day. Heard it right through even the thick walls of the dressing room at the TV studio. You could say it was none of my business but I busted in anyway and said, "Can I help, Aydah?"

You wouldn't think a girl seven feet tall and so thin that her veins stood out like cords could look wistful and appealing, but she did. Her bright red eyes were glistening with tears which she certainly could ill afford to waste, considering how dehydrated Martians are.

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She said, "What can you do? What can anyone do?" Luckily she was sitting down, sort of scrunched over because I put her head on my shoulder and patted the long, thin white hair, which I certainly would not have been able to do without a ladder if she'd been standing, and said, "Tell me about it."

"Mr. Barrow," she gulped, "I guess I sort of love him or I wouldn't stay on — but how can I love and hate someone at the same time?"

I patted her head and was silently sorry for her.

She asked, "Don't you know? I've read all the Earth books I could find, all that have anything to do with love and I can't find any answer." She sobbed, "They don't explain it at all. Can't you tell me?"

That was a poser all right. I'm past the age where sex or love or any of that sort of nonesense means very much to me, but I have a good memory. . . .

"Whatever possessed you to fall for an Earthman, Aydah?" It was a stupid question but I was just making conversation.

She lowered her head and rested it on my chest. I kept patting it sort of ineffectually while she talked. "I don't really know. He came along when I was the right age and mother had always kept me away from Martian boys. She kept saying I wasn't old enough . . . she didn't see any danger in an Earthman, I guess. But Duneen isn't fat like you, Mr. Barrow, or like most Earth people. He's almost as thin and handsome as a Martian. And he can talk so beautifully . . . when he wants to." She was off in racking sobs again.

That was when Duneen stalked in. He was in high, low and medium dudgeon. He said, "Why you — Martian gutter snipe! I take you in and this is the way you behave the first time my back is turned. Carrying on with an old man! Why you . . ."

He looked all set to beat her up so I intervened. I said, "Look, Duneen, you know that I've come up with some good ideas for your show."

He nodded. At least I had his attention. I went on quickly, "I think I have a brand new idea for an escape."

Jealousy faded before his interest in a new trick. He asked, "What's the gag?"

"You've escaped from every kind of gadget that anyone could think up. You've challenged people to think of restraints that will hold you for more than five minutes, right?"

"Of course," Duneen said impatiently. "I've escaped from things that would have killed that old timer, Houdini!" He grunted. "That old faker! I get mad every time I read about him!"

He did too. He seemed to be furious because he had come too late in

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time to match wits with the great magicians of the earlier days. He felt, and I guess he was right, that he could have topped any of them.

"What is it?" he asked impatiently, turning back to face Aydah.

I said quickly, "How about escaping from a Klein bottle?"

"What? What's that?"

I sighed. Sometimes his stupidity about anything outside of his own field appalled me. I made it as simple as I could. "Look," I said, picking up a narrow strip of paper, "you know what a Moebius strip is?"

He looked unsure so I glued one end of the strip to the other end making the half twist in the paper that has to be made in order for the topological principle to work. Using a pencil I showed him how a line could be drawn on both sides of the paper despite the fact that I didn't lift the pencil from the paper. I said, "See? It's a one-sided figure!"

He grunted. "Oh that!" He picked up a pair of scissors and cut around the loop of paper. It formed into two interlocked circles, of course. He said, "This is the Afghan bands. Why didn't you say so?"

"Maybe that's what magicians used to call it," I said, "but it's a Moebius strip and it will help . . ."

He was scowling now, all thought of Aydah gone from his mind. He asked, "What's all this got to do with me? I can't escape from a strip of paper. That's ridiculous!"

"No, of course not. But if you think of this strip of paper as a two dimensional object that has strange properties because of the twist in it, which is in the third dimension, it will help you to think about the Klein bottle."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Look," I said, "a Klein bottle is a fourth dimensional equivalent of the Moebius strip. Picture a bottle made out of a hard rubbery substance. Now bend the neck of the bottle down and around, and push the mouth of the bottle through the side of the bottle without breaking the surface of the bottle."

He really wasn't too stupid. He said, "That's the point at which it goes through the fourth dimension, eh?"

"Yes, now suppose I made up a bottle like that big enough for you to get into. . . ."

"So what's so good about escaping from a bottle? That has no drama, no excitement!"

"You don't get it! According to topological laws which were proved the first time they made a real Klein bottle 50 years ago, a fly walking on the surface of the bottle is on the inside-outside of the bottle and can never get in or out of the bottle. Any school boy knows that!"

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He whistled through his teeth. "I think you have something there. Not that the basic idea is much good, but I'll build on it. I'll make this the most sensational escape that has ever been done. Houdini! Phooey!" A sudden thought stopped him. "What's the gaff?"

I said, "Huh?" But I knew what he meant. He always irritated me, using show business terms that had been obsolete for many years, although I've noticed lately that he has me doing it too.

"What's the gaff," he repeated, "how do I escape the fate of the fly?"

"You're not thinking, Duneen. If you ever climbed into a real Klein bottle that would be the end of you. You'd be alive-dead. Halfway between here and the fourth dimensional world — you'd be stranded!"

"So?" he asked.

"So we have to rig up a substitute bottle. A fake."

"Okay, it's a deal. You get to work on it." He turned his attention back to Aydah. He said, "Now you, listen to me!" She cowered away from him.

She had to listen to him. I didn't. I left but I was mad. Bullying Aydah was about on a par with kicking a sick puppy. If I could, I would have taken a punch at him, not that it would have done any good.

He could sneer all he wanted to at Houdini and the other old timers but he had learned their lesson well. His publicity on the Klein bottle escape was a masterpiece. By the time I had constructed the two bottles, the real and the fake one, he had everyone talking about Klein bottles and how foolhardy he was, how he was defying the most dreadful fate a man had ever faced. He planted pieces in the news about topology. He had planes drop hundreds of thousands of Moebius strips and each strip had DUNEEN DEFIES DEATH! lettered on it along with instructions about the strip. He bombarded the press services with handouts. He challenged Miklav and Ronner, the two top topologists of the day, to figure out how he would escape. He bet them 10,000 credits that he would escape in five minutes, with a proviso that he would pay a thousand credits a minute to their favorite charity for every minute over five that he was stuck in the bottle.

The harder he worked the worse he treated Aydah. I had to keep out of the way or I would have hung a punch on his long, aquiline nose.

It seemed as if every time I turned around I'd find her hiding in some corner, crying. The loss of water through her tears began to tell on her. I finally had to call in a doctor and have some saline solution injected intravenously or she would have just faded away. It was when she was stretched out getting the intravenous that I first noticed that her ordinarily concave stomach was getting a little convex.

I guess that was when I began to get really mad at Duneen. Mad enough to do something about the whole bloody mess . . .

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But she never really complained, not out loud anyway. That one outburst to me was all. She would just mope around and look at Duneen hopefully, and then her eyes would fill up with tears and off she'd go for another quiet cry.

I tell you it got me down. But there was nothing I could do, not even when I found out what was back of it all. I spotted Duneen one night with another girl, an Earth girl, but I couldn't see where it would do any good to tell Aydah that. So I just kept busy on my props, getting everything ready and keeping my fingers crossed.

If you were anywhere within eyesight of a TV set that night you saw what happened, at least from out front. But I know what happened backstage and that's what I wanted to tell you about.

Everything went off like clockwork and you can believe me when I say that he was magnificent. With all his faults, with all his pettiness, despite his charlatanry, or maybe because of it, he was great. The last of the magicians and the greatest!

Naturally, he didn't open with the escape. That was to be his climax. He prefaced it with little run-of-the-mill items like an endless production of Martian geezers, those cute little six-legged creatures with the red eyes and white hair. They always reminded me of Aydah and that night I was more aware of the resemblance as he kept reaching into his tall hat and producing the little things as though the supply was endless. Then it was pure poetry when he plucked obsolete coins of every denomination out of the air and sent them clattering into a metal bowl. You know: parlor tricks, simple little things, but he did them with such an air!

Backstage the technicians kept a wary eye on the real Klein bottle which I had ready. I could see that they wanted no part of it or of the fate of the man who was supposed to escape from it.

When Duneen was sure that he had milked every bit of suspense out of his act he stopped and held up his hands in that corny, theatrical gesture of his and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, next — I present the challenge escape of all time! I shall enter a Klein bottle. . . ."

He gestured at it as it was wheeled on stage. There was no sound as the stage hands placed a three-fold screen around the bottle. Duneen went on, "I will escape from that bottle in five minutes or . . ." He was a good enough showman not to finish the sentence.

He had Miklav and Donner come on stage and examine the bottle. They seemed oddly out of place, these men of science, these topologists, as they examined the bottle.

Duneen said, "Gentlemen, do you agree that the bottle is a true Klein bottle?" They nodded.

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Duneen went off stage. He was sure enough of himself to leave the stage empty while he changed into trunks. His excuse was to show that he had no gadgets on his person to aid him. He always performed his escapes that way. But I never thought that this was the real reason he stripped. I think he liked to hear the shocked gasp when people saw his skeletally thin frame. Of all earthmen I've ever seen, he came closest to looking like a Martian. Seeing him that way I could understand a little better why Aydah had fallen in love with him.

I was off stage, left. I had nothing to do but keep an eye on things. Nothing much could go wrong because I had decided that the best way to switch the real and the fake Klein bottles would, after all, be the simplest way. I had made two trap doors in the stage. I don't suppose anyone has used traps for tricks for centuries. That's why I was sure the hoary old gag would fool the audience. Duneen agreed with me and he was never wrong about what would fool people.

The arrangement was merely this. The real Klein bottle was on stage and would stay there until the experts had examined it and pronounced it to be indubitably what it was, a fourth dimensional bottle. Once they had pronounced it legitimate, Duneen would conceal it behind a three fold screen; pressure on a button would activate the trap doors. The real bottle would sink out of sight. A fake Klein bottle, which looked real enough but did not have the properties of the topological figure, would rise up to replace the genuine one.

As you can see, the mechanics of the trick were a cinch. But, according to Duneen, that was the real secret of good magic. Complexity, he maintained, is no good. People can dope it out. You must use a simple device, so simple that your audience discards it as a possibility just because of its simplicity.

Duneen stood next to me in the wings, breathing deeply, bracing himself for his appearance on stage. The button that made the trap doors work was near us, on the wall. He pressed the button. Aydah ran over to join us as, outside, on stage, the announcer was saying, "And now—we have the honor and privilege of presenting . . ." There was a long drum roll and then, "Duneen!"

That was the cue. He stalked out on stage. Aydah was next to me. We both watched him. Duneen was bowing to the audience. He blew a kiss to a girl who was sitting down front. She was the earth girl I had seen him with. I was near enough to Aydah to feel her thin body stiffen. Then she did know about Duneen and . . .

On stage center Duneen motioned for the stage hands to remove the screen that had masked the man-sized bottle. He gestured at it. His grin was at its most sardonic as he lifted one of his spidery legs and placed it around

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the shoulder of the bottle. The stage hands stood ready with the screen and as he nodded to them they stepped forward with it. He lifted his other leg prepratory to mounting the bottle like a horse.

Aydah shivered and then sobbed, "I can't . . . I can't let him do it!" The screen was almost around the magician now. She reached over my shoulder and tried to press the button that would switch the bottle.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I . . ." Her eyes were frantic. "I can't do it! I switched the bottles before! That's the *real* Klein bottle he's . . ."

It was too late to press the button. She said hastily, "I'll go tell him to stall! Then when the screen hides him completely, you press the button and switch back the fake bottle! How could I have been so cruel!" She ran out on stage.

Darting to his side she whispered to him. Even then, with the eyes of the world on him, he almost cuffed her. I saw his hand start up, saw her back away, before he caught himself and remembered where he was. He managed to turn his grimace of hatred into a smile as he turned to face the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen, my 'invaluable' assistant tells me that there are some reporters back stage who would like to be out here as a committee. I extend my welcome to them!"

It was a good stall. I don't think anyone knew what had really happened. The stage hands surrounded the bottle with the screen while Duneen bowed to the reporters.

Aydah ran to my side. "Press the button."

She watched me while I did so and then turned and made a motion for Duneen to proceed. The side of his face to the audience was smiling, but there was black and bitter loathing in his eyes when he turned away.

He faced the bottle again. The screen was brought forward. Mounting the bottle, his arms and legs straddled the shoulder of it. Then, as he allowed himself to slide down towards the spot where the mouth of the bottle went through the side of it, a curious thing happened.

He seemed to become rubbery. One moment he was all on the outside of the bottle, the next, a cross section of him seemed to be inside it. That was all anyone saw as the screen cut off the view.

Aydah sobbed at my side. "Let him go to her. I have no hold on him. We're not married . . . we could never marry, not with the law about miscegenation between Mars and Earth people. Let her have him."

"None," I agreed, "except for the fact that he has condemned you to death!"

Involuntarily she looked down at her little belly. Then she looked at me. "You knew?"

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"Sure, I could see you were pregnant a month ago. And there's no escape from the death penalty for miscegenation." I patted her shoulder. "He should have had you aborted while there was still time."

"It's too late now," she said and turned her back. I knew that as well as she did.

On stage the reporters were eyeing their watches. The music, keyed for suspense, was getting nerve wracking as the minutes dragged by. The audience became restive. The two professors of topology looked frightened. One of them, I think it was Miklav, broke away from a friend who tried to restrain him. Miklav shouted, "What do I care about any bet! That man is in trouble!"

He shoved aside the screen and, of course, he was right. Duneen was in real bad trouble. He was half in and half out of the Klein bottle. He was on the inside-outside, never-come-right-side of the bottle. There he was, and there he is now. In the museum with all the other last things. And there he'll stay. They can't break the bottle because that would divide him. And since they can't break the bottle there he will remain, not alive and not dead — suspended midway between here and there. Wherever *there* is in the fourth dimension.

It isn't very pretty. But then neither was what he did to Aydah. I might have felt just a little pity for him, but I saw her die. She killed herself just before the authorities got around to it.

I knew she would have to die . . . That was why I had pressed the button that switched the bottles the first time, before she ever did . . . That cancelled out the later switch when she thought she was saving him . . . It made an odd sequence.

Get it? The real bottle was up there on the stage when the topologists looked at it. I switched it for the fake one so, when Duneen made *his* switch, it was the real one that came up! Aydah almost screwed up the works when she pulled her switch and brought the fake bottle back up on stage. It turned out okay, though. She thought the real bottle was up there and when she begged me to make the change — the real Klein bottle was ready and waiting for Duneen!

Sometimes when I go the museum of last things to look at him, I think of the old stories about evil genies and the way they were stuffed into bottles. I guess I must be getting old; lately I've taken to wondering about King Solomon. He knew so much, I wonder if he knew about Klein bottles . . .

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The Samoans called Robert Louis Stevenson Tusitala: *"the teller of tales." As usual, aboriginal nomenclature was particularly appropriate; the flame of Stevenson's storytelling genius never burned more sharply than during those last four years of his life spent on the gracious island. On Samoa he wrote two of his greatest fantasies: the frequently anthologized* The Bottle Imp *and the much less familiar* The Isle Of Voices. *Fanny Osbourne Stevenson writes that* The Isle of Voices *was the result of a visit to the island of Fakarava. While there she and her husband developed a strong friendship with the island's governor, M. Donat Rimareau. Each evening the three would foregather on the Stevenson verandah. As the moon rose over the lagoon RLS would begin the evening's talk with his inimitable tales of Scots bogles; in his turn M. Rimareau would top even these with accounts of those peculiar demons who haunt the islands and waters of the South Pacific. From these moonlit evenings under the palms came this beguiling story of the lazy Keola and his fearsome father-in-law. It would seem that we owe a very particular debt to M. Rimareau.*

The Isle of Voices

by ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

KEOLA was married with Lehua, daughter of Kalamake, the wise man of Molokai, and he kept his dwelling with the father of his wife. There was no man more cunning than that prophet; he read the stars, he could divine by the bodies of the dead, and by the means of evil creatures: he could go alone into the highest parts of the mountain, into the region of the hobgoblins, and there he would lay snares to entrap the spirits of the ancients.

For this reason no man was more consulted in all the Kingdom of Hawaii. Prudent people bought, and sold, and married, and laid out their lives by his counsels; and the King had him twice to Kona to seek the treasures of Kamehameha. Neither was any man more feared: of his enemies, some had dwindled in sickness by the virtue of his incantations, and some had been spirited away, the life and the clay both, so that folk looked in vain for so much as a bone of their bodies. It was rumored that he had the art or the gift of the old heroes. Men had seen him at night upon the mountains,

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stepping from one cliff to the next; they had seen him walking in the high forest, and his head and shoulders were above the trees.

This Kalamake was a strange man to see. He was come of the best blood in Molokai and Maui, of a pure descent; and yet he was more white to look upon than any foreigner; his hair the color of dry grass, and his eyes red and very blind, so that "Blind as Kalamake that can see across tomorrow," was a byword in the islands.

Of all these doings of his father-in-law, Keola knew a little by the common repute, a little more he suspected, and the rest he ignored. But there was one thing troubled him. Kalamake was a man that spared for nothing, whether to eat or to drink, or to wear; and for all he paid in bright new dollars. "Bright as Kalamake's dollars," was another saying in the Eight Isles. Yet he neither sold, nor planted, nor took hire — only now and then from his sorceries — and there was no source conceivable for so much silver.

It chanced one day Keola's wife was gone upon a visit to Kaunakakai on the lee side of the island, and the men were forth at the sea-fishing. But Keola was an idle dog, and he lay in the verandah and watched the surf beat on the shore and the birds fly about the cliff. It was a chief thought with him always — the thought of the bright dollars. When he lay down to bed he would be wondering why they were so many, and when he woke at morn he would be wondering why they were all new; and the thing was never absent from his mind. But this day of all days he made sure in his heart of some discovery. For it seems he had observed the place where Kalamake kept his treasure, which was a lock-fast desk against the parlor wall, under the print of Kamehameha the fifth, and a photograph of Queen Victoria with her crown; and it seems again that, no later than the night before, he found occasion to look in, and behold! the bag lay there empty. And this was the day of the steamer; he could see her smoke off Kalaupapa; and she must soon arrive with a month's goods, tinned salmon and gin, and all manner of rare luxuries for Kalamake.

"Now if he can pay for his goods today," Keola thought, "I shall know for certain that the man is a warlock, and the dollars come out of the devil's pocket."

While he was so thinking, there was his father-in-law behind him, looking vexed.

"Is that the steamer?" he asked.

"Yes," said Keola. "She has but to call at Pelekunu, and then she will be here."

"There is no help for it then," returned Kalmake, "and I must take you in my confidence, Keola, for the lack of anyone better. Come here within the house."

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So they stepped together into the parlor, which was a very fine room, papered and hung with prints, and furnished with a rocking-chair, and a table and a sofa in the European style. There was a shelf of books besides, and a family Bible in the midst of the table, and the lock-fast writing-desk against the wall; so that any one could see it was the house of a man of substance.

Kalamake made Keola close the shutters of the windows, while he himself locked all the doors and set open the lid of the desk. From this he brought forth a pair of necklaces hung with charms and shells, a bundle of dried herbs, and the dried leaves of trees, and a green branch of palm.

"What I am about," said he, "is a thing beyond wonder. The men of old were wise; they wrought marvels, and this among the rest; but that was at night, in the dark, under the fit stars and in the desert. The same will I do here in my own house, and under the plain eye of day." So saying, he put the Bible under the cushion of the sofa so that it was all covered, brought out from the same place a mat of a wonderfully fine texture, and heaped the herbs and leaves on sand in a tin pan. And then he and Keola put on the necklaces and took their stand upon the opposite corners of the mat.

"The time comes," said the warlock, "be not afraid."

With that he set flame to the herbs, and began to mutter and wave the branch of palm. At first the light was dim because of the closed shutters; but the herbs caught strongly afire, and the flames beat upon Keola, and the room glowed with the burning; and next the smoke rose and made his head swim and his eyes darken, and the sound of Kalamake muttering ran in his ears. And suddenly, to the mat on which they were standing came a snatch or twitch, that seemed to be more swift than lightning. In the same wink the room was gone, and the house, the breath all beaten from Keola's body. Volumes of sun rolled upon his eyes and head, and he found himself transported to a beach of the sea, under a strong sun, with a great surf roaring: he and the warlock standing there on the same mat, speechless, gasping and grasping at one another, and passing their hands before their eyes.

"What was this?" cried Keola, who came to himself the first, because he was the younger. "The pang of it was like death."

"It matters not," panted Kalamake. "It is now done."

"And, in the name of God, where are we?" cried Keola.

"That is not the question," replied the sorcerer. "Being here, we have matter in our hands, and that we must attend to. Go, while I recover my breath, into the borders of the wood, and bring me the leaves of such and such an herb, and such and such a tree, which you will find to grow there

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plentifully — three handfuls of each. And be speedy. We must be home again before the steamer comes; it would seem strange if we had disappeared." And he sat on the sand and panted.

Keola went up the beach, which was of shining sand and coral, strewn with singular shells; and he thought in his heart:

"How do I not know this beach? I will come here again and gather shells."

In front of him was a line of palms against the sky; not like the palms of the Eight Islands, but tall and fresh and beautiful and hanging out withered fans like gold among the green, and he thought in his heart:

"It is strange I should not have found this grove. I will come here again, when it is warm, to sleep." And he thought, "How warm it has grown suddenly!" For it was winter in Hawaii, and the day had been chill. And he thought also, "Where are the gray mountains? And where is the high cliff with the hanging forests and the wheeling birds?" And the more he considered, the less he might conceive in what quarter of the islands he was fallen.

In the border of the grove, where it met the beach, the herb was growing, but the tree farther back. Now, as Keola went towards the tree, he was aware of a young woman who had nothing on her body but a belt of leaves.

"Well!" thought Keola, "they are not very particular about their dress in this part of the country." And he paused, supposing she would observe him and escape; and seeing that she still looked before her, stood and hummed aloud. Up she leaped at the sound. Her face was ashen; she looked this way and that, and her mouth gaped with the terror of her soul. But it was a strange thing that her eyes did not rest upon Keola.

"Good day," said he. "You need not be so frightened, I will not eat you." And he had scarce opened his mouth before the young woman fled into the bush.

"These are strange manners," thought Keola, and, not thinking what he did, ran after her.

As she ran, the girl kept crying in some speech that was not practised in Hawaii, yet some of the words were the same, and he knew she kept calling and warning others. And presently he saw more people running — men, women, and children, one with another, all running and crying like people at a fire. And with that he began to grow afraid himself, and returned to Kalamake bringing the leaves. Him he told just what he had seen.

"You must pay no heed," said Kalamake. "All this is like a dream and shadows. All will disappear and be forgotten."

"It seemed none saw me," said Keola.

"And none did," replied the sorcerer. "We walk here in the broad sun

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invisible by reason of these charms. Yet they hear us; and therefore it is well to speak softly, as I do."

With that he made a circle round the mat with stones, and in the midst he set the leaves.

"It will be your part," said he, "to keep the leaves alight, and feed the fire slowly. While they blaze (which is but for a little moment) I must do my errand; and before the ashes blacken, the same power that brought us carries us away. Be ready now with the match; and do you call me in good time lest the flames burn out and I be left."

As soon as the leaves caught, the sorcerer leaped like a deer out of the circle, and began to race along the beach like a hound that has been bathing. As he ran, he kept stooping to snatch shells; and it seemed to Keola that they glittered as he took them. The leaves blazed with a clear flame that consumed them swiftly; and presently Keola had but a handful left, and the sorcerer was far off, running and stopping.

"Back!" cried Keola. "Back! The leaves are near done."

At that Kalamake turned, and if he had run before, now he flew. But fast as he ran, the leaves burned faster. The flame was ready to expire when, with a great leap, he bounded on the mat. The wind of his leaping blew it out; and with that the beach was gone, and the sun and the sea; and they stood once more in the dimness of the shuttered parlor, and were once more shaken and blinded; and on the mat betwixt them lay a pile of shining dollars. Keola ran to the shutters; and there was the steamer tossing in the swell close in.

The same night Kalamake took his son-in-law apart, and gave him $5 in his hand.

"Keola," said he; "if you are a wise man (which I am doubtful of) you will think you slept this afternoon on the verandah, and dreamed as you were sleeping. I am a man of few words, and I have for my helpers people of short memories."

Never a word more said Kalamake, nor referred again to that affair. But it ran all the while in Keola's head — if he were lazy before, he would now do nothing.

"Why should I work," thought he, "when I have a father-in-law who makes dollars of sea-shells?"

Presently his share was spent. He spent it all upon fine clothes. And then he was sorry:

"For," thought he, "I had done better to have bought a concertina, with which I might have entertained myself all day long." And then he began to grow vexed with Kalamake.

"This man has the soul of a dog," thought he. "He can gather dollars

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when he pleases on the beach, and he leaves me to pine for a concertina! Let him beware: I am no child, I am as cunning as he, and hold his secret." With that he spoke to his wife Lehua, and complained of her father's manners.

"I would let my father be," said Lehua. "He is a dangerous man to cross."

"I care that for him!" cried Keola; and snapped his fingers. "I have him by the nose. I can make him do what I please." And he told Lehua the story. But she shook her head.

"You may do what you like," said she; "but as sure as you thwart my father, you will be no more heard of. Think of this person, and that person; think of Hua, who was a noble of the House of Representatives, and went to Honolulu every year; and not a bone or a hair of him was found. Remember Kamau, and how he wasted to a thread, so that his wife lifted him with one hand. Keola, you are a baby in my father's hands; he will take you with his thumb and finger and eat you like a shrimp."

Now Keola was truly afraid of Kalamake, but he was vain too; and these words of his wife's incensed him.

"Very well," said he, "if that is what you think of me, I will show how much you are deceived." And he went straight to his father-in-law.

"Kalamake," said he, "I want a concertina."

"Do you, indeed?" said Kalamake.

"Yes," said he, "and I may as well tell you plainly, I mean to have it. A man who picks up dollars on the beach can certainly afford a concertina."

"I had no idea you had so much spirit," replied the sorcerer. "I thought you were a timid, useless lad, and I cannot describe how much pleased I am to find I was mistaken. Now I begin to think I may have found an assistant and successor in my difficult business. A concertina? You shall have the best in Honolulu. And tonight, as soon as it is dark, you and I will go and find the money."

"Shall we return to the beach?" asked Keola.

"No, no!" replied Kalamake; "you must begin to learn more of my secrets. Last time I taught you to pick shells; this time I shall teach you to catch fish. Are you strong enough to launch Pili's boat?"

"I think I am," returned Keola. "But why should we not take your own?"

"I have a reason which you will understand thoroughly before tomorrow," said Kalamake. "Pili's boat is the better suited for my purpose. So, if you please, let us meet there as soon as it is dark; and in the meanwhile, let us keep our own counsel, for there is no cause to let the family into our business."

Honey is not more sweet than was the voice of Kalamake, and Keola could scarce contain his satisfaction.

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"I might have had my concertina weeks ago," thought he, "and there is nothing needed in this world but a little courage." Presently after he spied Lehua weeping, and was half in a mind to tell her all was well.

"But no," thinks he; "I shall wait till I can show her the concertina; we shall see what the chit will do then. Perhaps she will understand in the future that her husband is a man of some intelligence."

As soon as it was dark father and son-in-law launched Pili's boat and set the sail. There was a great sea, and it blew strong from the leeward; but the boat was swift and light and dry, and skimmed the waves. The wizard had a lantern, which he lit and held with his finger through the ring, and the two sat in the stern and smoked cigars, of which Kalamake had always a provision, and spoke like friends of magic and the great sums of money which they could make by its exercise, and what they should buy first, and what second; and Kalamake talked like a father.

Presently he looked all about, and above him at the stars, and back at the island, which was already three parts sunk under the sea, and he seemed to consider ripely his position.

"Look!" says he, "there is Molokai already far behind us, and Maui like a cloud; and by the bearing of these three stars I know I am come to where I desire. This part of the sea is called the Sea of the Dead. It is in this place extraordinarily deep, and the floor is all covered with the bones of men, and in the holes of this part gods and goblins keep their habitation. The flow of the sea is to the north, stronger than a shark can swim, and any man who shall here be thrown out of a ship it bears away like a wild horse into the uttermost ocean. Presently he is spent and goes down, and his bones are scattered with the rest, and the gods devour his spirit."

Fear came on Keola at the words, and he looked, and by the light of the stars and the lantern, the warlock seemed to change.

"What ails you?" cried Keola, quick and sharp.

"It is not I who am ailing," said the wizard; "but there is one here sick."

With that he changed his grasp upon the lantern, and, behold — as he drew his finger from the ring, the finger stuck and the ring was burst, and his hand was grown to be the bigness of three.

At that sight Keola screamed and covered his face.

But Kalamake held up the lantern. "Look rather at my face!" said he — and his head was huge as a barrel; and still he grew and grew as a cloud grows on a mountain, and Keola sat before him screaming, and the boat raced on the great seas.

"And now," said the wizard, "what do you think about that concertina? and are you sure you would not rather have a flute? No?" says he; "that is well, for I do not like my family to be changeable of purpose. But I begin

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to think I had better get out of this paltry boat, for my bulk swells to a very unusual degree, and if we are not the more careful, she will presently be swamped."

With that he threw his legs over the side. Even as he did so, the greatness of the man grew thirty-fold and forty-fold as swift as sight or thinking, so that he stood in the deep sea to the armpits, and his head and shoulders rose like a high isle, and the swell beat and burst upon his bosom, as it beats and breaks against a cliff. The boat ran still to the north, but he reached out his hand, and took the gunwale by the finger and thumb, and broke the side like a biscuit, and Keola was spilled into the sea. And the pieces of the boat the sorcerer crushed in the hollow of his hand and flung miles away into the night.

"Excuse me taking the lantern," said he; "for I have a long wade before me, and the land is far, and the bottom of the sea uneven, and I feel the bones under my toes."

And he turned and went off walking with great strides; and as soon as Keola sank in the trough he could see him no longer; but as often as he was heaved upon the crest, there he was striding and dwindling, and he held the lamp high over his head, and the waves broke white about him.

Since first the islands were fished out of the sea, there was never a man so terrified as this Keola. He swam indeed, but he swam as puppies swim when they are cast in to drown, and knew not wherefore. He could but think of the hugeness of the swelling of the warlock, of that face which was great as a mountain, of those shoulders that were broad as an isle, and of the seas that beat on them in vain. He thought, too, of the concertina, and shame took hold upon him; and of the dead men's bones, and fear shook him.

Of a sudden he was aware of something dark against the stars that tossed, and a light below, and a brightness of the cloven sea; and he heard speech of men. He cried out aloud and a voice answered; and in a twinkling the bows of a ship hung above him on a wave like a thing balanced, and swooped down. He caught with his two hands in the chains of her, and the next moment was buried in the rushing seas, and the next hauled on board by seamen.

They gave him gin and biscuit and dry clothes, and asked him how he came where they found him, and whether the light which they had seen was the lighthouse, Lae o Ka Laau. But Keola knew white men are like children and only believe their own stories; so about himself he told them what he pleased, and as for the light (which was Kalamake's lantern) he vowed he had seen none.

This ship was a schooner bound for Honolulu, and then to trade in the

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low islands; and by a very good chance for Keola she had lost a man off the bowsprit in a squall. It was no use talking. Keola durst not stay in the Eight Islands. Word goes so quickly, and all men are so fond to talk and carry news, that if he hid in the north end of Kauai or in the south end of Kaü, the wizard would have wind of it before a month, and he must perish. So he did what seemed the most prudent, and shipped sailor in the place of the man who had been drowned.

In some ways the ship was a good place. The food was extraordinarily rich and plenty, with biscuits and salt beef every day, and pea-soup and puddings made of flour and suet twice a week, so that Keola grew fat. The captain also was a good man, and the crew no worse than other whites. The trouble was the mate, who was the most difficult man to please Keola had ever met with, and beat and cursed him daily, both for what he did and what he did not. The blows that he dealt were very sure, for he was strong; and the words he used were very unpalatable, for Keola was come of a good family and accustomed to respect. And what was the worst of all, whenever Keola found a chance to sleep, there was the mate awake and stirring him up with a rope's end. Keola saw it would never do; and he made up his mind to run away.

They were about a month out from Honolulu when they made the land. It was a fine starry night, the sea was smooth as well as the sky fair; it blew a steady trade; and there was the island on their weather bow, a ribbon of palm-trees lying flat along the sea. The captain and the mate looked at it with the night glass, and named the name of it, and talked of it, beside the wheel where Keola was steering. It seemed it was an isle where no traders came. By the captain's way, it was an isle besides where no man dwelt; but the mate thought otherwise.

"I don't give a cent for the directory," said he. "I've been past here one night in the schooner *Eugenie:* it was just such a night as this; they were fishing with torches, and the beach was thick with lights like a town."

"Well, well," says the captain, "it's steep-to, that's the great point; and there ain't any outlying dangers by the chart, so we'll just hug the lee side of it. Keep her ramping full, don't I tell you!" he cried to Keola, who was listening so hard that he forgot to steer.

And the mate cursed him, and swore that Kanaka was for no use in the world, and if he got started after him with a belaying-pin, it would be a cold day for Keola. And so the captain and mate lay down on the house together, and Keola was left to himself.

"This island will do very well for me," he thought; "if no traders deal there, the mate will never come. And as for Kalamake, it is not possible he can ever get as far as this."

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With that he kept edging the schooner nearer in. He had to do this quietly, for it was the trouble with these white men, and above all with the mate, that you could never be sure of them; they would all be sleeping sound, or else pretending, and if a sail shook, they would jump to their feet and fall on you with a rope's end. So Keola edged her up little by little, and kept all drawing. And presently the land was close on board.

With that, the mate sat up suddenly upon the house.

"What are you doing?" he roars. "You'll have the ship ashore!"

And he made one bound for Keola, and Keola made another clean over the rail and plump into the starry sea. When he came up again, the schooner had payed off on her true course, and the mate stood by the wheel himself, and Keola heard him cursing. The sea was smooth under the lee of the island; it was warm besides, and Keola had his sailor's knife, so he had no fear of sharks. A little way before him the trees stopped; there was a break in the line of the land like the mouth of a harbor; and the tide, which was then flowing, took him up and carried him through. One minute he was without, and the next within, had floated there in a wide shallow water, bright with ten thousand stars, and all about him was the ring of the land with its string of palm-trees.

The time of Keola in that place was in two periods — the period when he was alone, and the period when he was there with the tribe. At first he sought everywhere and found no man; only some houses standing in a hamlet, and the marks of fires. But the ashes of the fires were cold and the rains had washed them away; and the winds had blown, and some of the huts were overthrown. It was here he took his dwelling; and he made a fire drill, and a shell hook, and fished and cooked his fish, and climbed after green cocoa-nuts, the juice of which he drank, for in all the isle there was no water. The days were long to him, and the nights terrifying. He made a lamp of cocoa-shell, and drew the oil off the ripe nuts, and made a wick of fibre; and when evening came he closed up his hut, and lit his lamp, and lay and trembled till morning. Many a time he thought in his heart he would have been better in the bottom of the sea, his bones rolling there with the others.

All this while he kept by the inside of the island, for the huts were on the shore of the lagoon, and it was there the palms grew best, and the lagoon itself abounded with good fish. And to the outer side he went once only, and he looked but once at the beach of the ocean, and came away shaking. For the look of it, with its bright sand, and strewn shells, and strong sun and surf, went sore against his inclination.

"It cannot be," he thought, "and yet it is very like. And how do I know? These white men, although they pretend to know where they are sailing,

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must take their chances like other people. So that after all we have sailed in a circle, and I may be quite near to Molokai, and this may be the very beach where my father-in-law gathers his dollars."

It was perhaps a month later, when the people of the place arrived — the fill of six great boats. They were a fine race of men, and spoke a tongue that sounded very different from the tongue of Hawaii, but so many of the words were the same that it was not difficult to understand. The men besides were very courteous, and the women very towardly; and they made Keola welcome, and built him a house, and gave him a wife; and what surprised him the most, he was never sent to work with the young men.

And now Keola had three periods. First he had a period of being very sad, and then he had a period when he was pretty merry. Last of all, came the third, when he was the most terrified man in the four oceans.

The cause of the first period was the girl he had to wife. He was in doubt about the island, and he might have been in doubt about the speech, of which he had heard so little when he came there with the wizard on the mat. But about his wife there was no mistake conceivable, for she was the same girl that ran from him crying in the wood. So he had sailed all this way, and might as well have stayed in Molokai; and had left home and wife and all his friends for no other cause but to escape his enemy, and the place he had come to was that wizard's hunting ground, and the place where he walked invisible. It was at this period when he kept the most close to the lagoon side, and as far as he dared, abode in the cover of his hut.

The cause of the second period was talk he had heard from his wife and the chief islanders. Keola himself said little. He was never so sure of his new friends, for he judged they were too civil to be wholesome, and since he had grown better acquainted with his father-in-law the man had grown more cautious. So he told them nothing of himself, but only his name and descent, and that he came from the Eight Islands, and what fine islands they were; and about the king's palace in Honolulu, and how he was a chief friend of the king and the missionaries. But he put many questions and learned much. The island where he was was called the Isle of Voices; it belonged to the tribe, but they made their home upon another, three hours' sail to the southward. There they lived and had their permanent houses, and it was a rich island, where were eggs and chickens and pigs, and ships came trading with rum and tobacco. It was there the schooner had gone after Keola deserted; there, too, the mate had died, like the fool of a white man as he was. It seems, when the ship came, it was the beginning of the sickly season in that isle, when the fish of the lagoon are poisonous, and all who eat of them swell up and die. The mate was told of it; he saw the boats preparing, because in that season the people leave that island and sail

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to the Isle of Voices; but he was a fool of a white man, who would believe no stories but his own, and he caught one of these fish, cooked it and ate it, and swelled up and died, which was good news to Keola. As for the Isle of Voices, it lay solitary the most part of the year, only now and then a boat's crew came for copra, and in the bad season, when the fish at the main isle were poisonous, the tribe dwelt there in a body. It had its name from a marvel, for it seemed the sea-side of it was all beset with invisible devils; day and night you heard them talking with one another in strange tongues; day and night little fires blazed up and were extinguished on the beach; and what was the cause of these doings no man might conceive. Keola asked them if it were the same in their own island where they stayed, and they told him no, not there; nor yet in any other of some hundred isles that lay all about them in that sea; but it was a thing peculiar to the Isle of Voices. They told him also that these fires and voices were ever on the sea-side and in the seaward fringes of the wood, and a man might dwell by the lagoon two thousand years (if he could live so long) and never be any way troubled; and even on the seaside the devils did no harm if let alone. Only once a chief had cast a spear at one of the voices, and the same night he fell out of a cocoa-nut palm and was killed.

Keola thought a good bit with himself. He saw he would be all right when the tribe returned to the main island, and right enough where he was, if he kept by the lagoon, yet he had a mind to make things righter if he could. So he told the high chief he had once been in an isle that was pestered the same way, and the folk had found a means to cure that trouble.

"There was a tree growing in the bush there," says he, "and it seems these devils came to get the leaves of it. So the people of the isle cut down the tree wherever it was found, and the devils came no more."

They asked what kind of a tree this was, and he showed them the tree of which Kalamake burned the leaves. They found it hard to believe, yet the idea tickled them. Night after night the old men debated it in their councils, but the high chief (though he was a brave man) was afraid of the matter, and reminded them daily of the chief who cast a spear against the voices and was killed, and the thought of that brought all to a stand again.

Though he could not yet bring about the destruction of the trees, Keola was well enough pleased, and began to look about him and take pleasure in his days; and, among other things, he was the kinder to his wife, so that the girl began to love him greatly. One day he came to the hut, and she lay on the ground lamenting.

"Why," said Keola, "what is wrong with you now?"

She declared it was nothing.

The same night she woke him, and he saw by her face she was in sorrow.

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"Keola," she said, "put your ear to my mouth that I may whisper, for no one must hear us. Two days before the boats begin to be got ready, go you to the sea-side of the isle and lie in a thicket. We shall choose that place beforehand, you and I; and hide food; and every night I shall come near by there singing. So when a night comes and you do not hear me, you may know we are clean gone out of the island, and you may come forth again."

The soul of Keola died within him.

"What is this?" he cried. "I cannot live among devils. I will not be left behind upon this isle. I am dying to leave it."

"You will never leave it alive, my poor Keola," said the girl; "for to tell you the truth, my people are eaters of men; but this they keep secret. And the reason they will kill you before we leave is because in our island ships come, and Donat-Kimaran comes and talks for the French, and there is a white trader there in a house with a verandah, and a catechist. Oh, that is a fine place indeed! The trader has barrels filled with flour; and a French warship once came in the lagoon and gave everybody wine and biscuit. Ah, my poor Keola, I wish I could take you there, for great is my love to you, and it is the finest place in the seas except Papeete."

So now Keola was the most terrified man in the four oceans. He had heard tell of eaters of men in the south islands, and the thing had always been a fear to him; and here it was knocking at his door. He had heard besides, by travellers, of their practices, and how when they are in a mind to eat a man, they cherish and fondle him like a mother with a favourite baby. And he saw this must be his own case; and that was why he had been housed, and fed, and wived, and liberated from all work; and why the old men and the chiefs discoursed with him like a person of weight. So he lay on his bed and railed upon his destiny; and the flesh curdled on his bones.

The next day the people of the tribe were very civil, as their way was. They were elegant speakers, and they made beautiful poetry, and jested at meals, so that a missionary must have died laughing. It was little enough Keola cared for their fine ways; all he saw was the white teeth shining in their mouths, and his gorge rose at the sight; and when they were done eating, he went and lay in the bush like a dead man.

The next day it was the same, and then his wife followed him.

"Keola," she said, "if you do not eat, I tell you plainly you will be killed and cooked tomorrow. Some of the old chiefs are murmuring already. They think you are fallen sick and must lose flesh."

With that Keola got to his feet, and anger burned in him.

"It is little I care one way or the other," said he. "I am between the devil and the deep sea. Since die I must, let me die the quickest way; and since I must be eaten at the best of it, let me rather be eaten by hobgoblins

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than by men. Farewell," said he, and walked to the sea-side of that island.

It was all bare in the strong sun; there was no sign of man, only the beach was trodden, and all about him as he went, the voices talked and whispered, and the little fires sprang up and burned down. All tongues of the earth were spoken there: the French, the Dutch, the Russian, the Tamil, the Chinese. Whatever land knew sorcery, there were some of its people whispering in Keola's ear. That beach was thick as a cried fair, yet no man seen; and as he walked he saw the shells vanish before him, and no man to pick them up. I think the devil would have been afraid to be alone in such a company; but Keola was past fear and courted death. When the fires sprang up, he charged for them like a bull. Bodiless voices called to and fro; unseen hands poured sand upon the flames; and they were gone from the beach before he reached them.

"It is plain Kalamake is not here," he thought, "as I must have been killed long since."

With that he sat him down in the margin of the wood, for he was tired, and put his chin upon his hands. The business before his eyes continued; the beach babbled with voices, and the fires sprang up and sank, and the shells vanished and were renewed again even while he looked.

"It was a by-day when I was here before," he thought, "for it was nothing to this."

And his head was dizzy with the thought of these millions and millions of dollars, and all these hundreds and hundreds of persons culling them upon the beach, and flying in the air higher and swifter than eagles.

"And to think how they have fooled me with their talk of mints," says he, "and that money was made there, when it is clear that all the new coin in all the world is gathered on these sands! But I will know better the next time!" said he. And at last, he knew not very well how or when, sleep fell on Keola, and he forgot the island and all his sorrows.

Early the next day, before the sun was yet up, a bustle woke him. He awoke in fear, for he thought the tribe had caught him napping; but it was no such matter. Only, on the beach in front of him, the bodiless voices called and shouted one upon another, and it seemed they all passed and swept beside him up the coast of the island.

"What is afoot now?" thinks Keola. And it was plain to him it was something beyond ordinary, for the fires were not lighted nor the shells taken, but the bodiless voices kept posting up the beach, and hailing and dying away; and by the sound of them these wizards should be angry.

"It is not me they are angry at," thought Keola, "for they pass me close."

As when hounds go by, or horses in a race, or city folk coursing to a fire,

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and all men join and follow after, so it was now with Keola; and he knew not what he did, nor why he did it, but there, lo and behold! he was running with the voices.

So he turned one point of the island, and this brought him in view of a second; and there he remembered the wizard trees to have been growing by the score together in a wood. From this point there went up a hubbub of men crying not to be described; and by the sound of them, those that he ran with shaped their course for the same quarter. A little nearer, and there began to mingle with the outcry the crash of many axes. And at this a thought came at last into his mind that the high chief had consented; that the men of the tribe had set to cutting down these trees; that word had gone about the isle from sorcerer to sorcerer, and these were all now assembling to defend their trees. Desire of strange things swept him on. He posted with the voices, crossed the beach, and came into the borders of the wood, and stood astonished. One tree had fallen, others were part hewed away. There was the tribe clustered. They were back to back, and bodies lay, and blood flowed among their feet. The hue of fear was on all their faces; their voices went up to heaven shrill as a weasel's cry.

Have you seen a child when he is all alone and has a wooden sword, and fights, leaping and hewing with the empty air? Even so the man-eaters huddled back to back and heaved up their axes and laid on, and screamed as they laid on, and behold! no man to contend with them! only here and there Keola saw an axe swinging over against them without hands; and time and again a man of the tribe would fall before it, clove in twain or burst asunder, and his soul sped howling.

For a while Keola looked upon this prodigy like one that dreams, and then fear took him by the midst as sharp as death, that he should behold such doings. Even in that same flash the high chief of the clan espied him standing, and pointed and called out his name. Thereat the whole tribe saw him also, and their eyes flashed, and their teeth clashed.

"I am too long here," thought Keola, and ran farther out of the wood and down the beach, not caring whither.

"Keola!" said a voice close by upon the empty sand.

"Lehua! is that you!" he cried, and gasped, and looked in vain for her; but by the eyesight he was stark alone.

"I saw you pass before," the voice answered; "but you would not hear me. Quick! get the leaves and the herbs, and let us flee."

"You are there with the mat?" he asked.

"Here, at your side," said she. And felt her arms about him. "Quick! the leaves and the herbs, before my father can get back!"

So Keola ran for his life, and fetched the wizard fuel; and Lehua guided

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him back, and set his feet upon the mat, and made the fire. All the time of its burning, the sound of the battle towered out of the wood; the wizards and the man-eaters hard at fight; the wizards, the viewless ones, roaring out aloud like bulls upon a mountain, and the men of the tribe replying shrill and savage out of the terror of their souls. And all the time of the burning, Keola stood there and listened, and shook, and watched how the unseen hands of Lehua poured the leaves. She poured them fast, and the flame burned high, and scorched Keola's hands; and she speeded and blew the burning with her breath. The last leaf was eaten, the flame fell, and the shock followed, and there were Keola and Lehua in the room at home.

Now, when Keola could see his wife at last he was mighty pleased, and he was mighty pleased to be home again in Molokai and sit down beside a bowl of poi — for they made no poi on board ships, and there was none in the Isle of Voices — and he was out of the body with pleasure to be clean escaped out of the hands of the eaters of men. But there was another matter not so clear, and Lehua and Keola talked of it all night and were troubled. There was Kalamake left upon the isle. If, by the blessing of God, he could but stick there, all were well; but should he escape and return to Molokai, it would be an ill day for his daughter and her husband. They spoke of his gift of swelling and whether he could wade that distance in the seas. But Keola knew by this time where that island was — and that is to say, in the Low or Dangerous Archipelago. So they fetched the atlas and looked upon the distance in the map, and by what they could make of it, it seemed a far way for an old gentleman to walk. Still, it would not do to make too sure of a warlock like Kalamake, and they determined at last to take counsel of a white missionary.

So the first one that came by Keola told him everything. And the missionary was very sharp on him for taking the second wife in the low island; but for all the rest, he vowed he could make neither head nor tail of it.

"However," says he, "if you think this money of your father's ill-gotten, my advice to you would be to give some of it to the lepers and some to the missionary fund. And as for this extraordinary rigmarole, you cannot do better than keep it to yourselves." But he warned the police at Honolulu that, by all he could make out, Kalamake and Keola had been coining false money, and it would not be amiss to watch them.

Keola and Lehua took his advice, and gave many dollars to the lepers and the fund. And no doubt the advice must have been good, for from that day to this, Kalamake has never more been heard of. But whether he was slain in the battle by the trees, or whether he is still kicking his heels upon the Isle of Voices, who shall say?

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

THE chief new phenomenon of science fiction publishing in 1952 has been the development of the novel deliberately designed for the teen-age trade. For some years Robert A. Heinlein has been working alone in this field; but in recent months at least a dozen novels have appeared by other authors.

Since so many teen-agers read nominally adult science fiction, one may wonder what need there is for special teen-age books. The best of these answer that question: they differ from adult novels only in that their basic assumptions are a trifle simpler, for the benefit of those who have not been reading science fiction steadily for twenty years, and that the hero is himself a teen-age boy, for easier reader-identification with the protagonist's problems. (We'll venture the guess that there's a good market waiting, too, for the first author who makes his protagonist a teen-age girl.)

Good writing and careful development of a reasonably simple premise can lend these top-level teen-age books a strong adult appeal as well, particularly to the recent convert who shies away from the post-graduate van Vogt-Williamson-Asimov hyper-hypotheses. Best of the recent crop, and highly commended to young and old alike, are books by three writers familiar to F&SF readers: Arthur C. Clarke's ISLANDS IN THE SKY, a detailedly plausible and accurate fictional tour of the space stations which are probable in our very near future; Poul Anderson's VAULT OF THE AGES, a fine Haggardesque romantic melodrama of future barbarism; and Chad Oliver's MISTS OF DAWN, which combines solid thinking on the elements of time travel with a warmly sympathetic picture of Cro-Magnon civilization. All of these are part of Winston's series of juvenile science fiction novels; others in the series, unfortunately, seem to represent an irresponsible conviction on the part of Winston's prominently featured "editors" that trite plots, crude characterization, and scientific illiteracy are good enough to satisfy teen-agers.

Future fact, as well as fiction, is now being presented to the young. BY SPACE SHIP TO THE MOON by Jack Coggins and Fletcher Pratt (Random) is a worthy sequel to last year's fine ROCKETS, JETS, GUIDED MISSILES AND SPACE SHIPS. Pratt's text in both books is invaluable first-level instruction, not only for children, but for adults who shy away from the longer books by Clarke and Ley; and Coggins' numerous and admirable pictures make the books incredible bargains at a dollar apiece.

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And even the very young get their own special version of space travel in Ruthven Todd's SPACE CAT (Scribner's), a generally believable yet pleasingly absurd story of the first cat on the moon, which children and parents may enjoy respectively as high adventure and light-hearted fun.

Turning to what is specifically advertised as adult fare, we find ourselves blessed by what is definitely Wilson Tucker's best novel to date: THE LONG LOUD SILENCE (Rinehart). Writing with strikingly effective simplicity, Tucker tells the story of a mean, hard bastard managing to survive in the eastern half of a United States devastated by atomic and bacteriologic warfare. That the precision bombing which began at the Atlantic ended precisely at the east bank of the Mississippi is a little hard to take; but the quarantine set up between the two halves of the country by a panicked military, and the desperate propaganda to keep the war's victims on their own side of the river are all too bitterly believable. Of less consequence, either as story-telling or thinking, is Cyril Judd's GUNNER CADE (Simon & Schuster), a competent but not particularly palatable rehash of standard ideas. Anyone with a nodding acquaintance with Gibbon, Breasted or Prescott will find no new concepts in Isaac Asimov's FOUNDATION AND EMPIRE (Gnome) save the utterly incomprehensible ones contained in the author's own personal science of "psycho-history."

We have argued that A. E. van Vogt wrote plausible science fiction only in his short stories. The briefer form has disciplined his imagination, kept him, if not down to earth, at least inside the solar system. His newest collection, AWAY AND BEYOND (Pellegrini & Cudahy), gives strong support to our stand; it also makes us wish that he would get back to the craft he knows so well and give us more classics like *Asylum*, *Heir Unapparent*, *The Second Solution* and others of the nine stories here included.

No matter how disappointed you may have been by some of the year's earlier anthologies, the two most recent demand not only reading but purchase. THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1952 (Fell) is possibly the best volume yet in the annual series edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty. Seven of its eighteen stories are already familiar to readers of this magazine, but (we hope you agree) stand up well on rereading, especially the memorable items by Alfred Bester, Idris Seabright and Arthur Porges; and the eleven others, all interesting, include two splendid novelets from *Galaxy*, by C. M. Kornbluth and Fritz Leiber. Judith Merril's BEYOND HUMAN KEN (Random) proves that diligent research and sensitive editorial taste can still create a distinguished anthology of stories never before reprinted. Robots, BEMs, werewolves, angels and even whirlwinds become completely understandable fellow-beings in these fascinating studies of the wide range of conceivable sentient life, by such notable names as Benét,

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Heinlein, Jameson and Sturgeon (with F&SF's team of Seabright and Porges again strongly represented). The volume is further graced by Miss Merril's prefatory notes and her excellent supplementary bibliography, and by an introduction by Fletcher Pratt noteworthy for its shrewd analysis of the nature of science fiction and fantasy.

We must report more mixed reactions to the anonymously edited anthology of short novels, WITCHES THREE (Twayne). Fritz Leiber's CONJURE WIFE is one of the best of all novels on witchcraft survivals in the enlightened modern world; and its long-delayed appearance in hard covers is highly welcome. The volume is completed by an ingeniously thought-out novelet by James Blish and a long and dreary novel nominally by Fletcher Pratt, but clearly recognizable as by George U. Fletcher, author of 1948's WELL OF THE UNICORN.

28 SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF H. G. WELLS (Dover) heads our list of reprints not only because the book is a much needed reissue of much of The Master's best writing but also because its incredibly reasonable price strikes a valorous blow for deflation. For $3.95 the purchaser receives one long novel, MEN LIKE GODS, two short novels, STAR BEGOTTEN and A STORY OF THE DAYS TO COME, and 25 short stories — the complete volume totaling over 325,000 words! Fans of A. Merritt should rejoice in Liveright's two-in-one reprint, SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN and BURN WITCH BURN! both complete in one volume. To be found on the newsstands are paperbacks of Raymond J. Healy's brilliantly original anthology of last year, NEW TALES OF TIME AND SPACE (Pocket Books) and Sam Merwin's suspenseful novel, THE HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS (Galaxy Novels).

There-really-is-a-Santa-Claus note: The firm of E. P. Dutton generously contributes to our Yule merriment by reprinting E. R. Eddison's deathless THE WORM OUROBOROS. This new edition of the fabulously scarce classic has an introduction by Orville Prescott and illustrations by Keith Henderson. As this transcendent Christmas present is published just as we go to press a detailed review is not possible until our next issue.

As we write this, we do not know who will be our President-elect when it is published, but we do emphatically know that the wrong man won and that we have entered into a branch of time of which we do not approve. 1952 offered one ideal candidate, incredibly rejected by both major parties; and only in an alternate universe in which he was victorious would we be completely content. At any rate we can all console ourselves by reading and rereading the major campaign biography of this or any other year, Walt Kelly's immortal I GO POGO (Simon & Schuster).

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William Campbell Gault has been writing and selling successfully for some fifteen years; but it's in 1952 that he's finally come into his own. His 1952 record is indeed an impressive one: a novelet on auto-racing in the Saturday Evening Post; *a juvenile on the same subject; short stories in two important anthologies; and two of the year's top hardboiled-but-human detective stories,* DON'T CRY FOR ME *and* THE BLOODY BOKHARA. *Of the first of these — one of the best first mystery novels in many years — Fredric Brown wrote: ". . . a beautiful chunk of story about people instead of characters. This boy Gault can* write, *never badly and sometimes like an angel." You'll find the vigor and irony of his murder novels in this story of an embittered escapist who chose to pass the point of no return.*

Joy Ride

by WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

HIS WIFE said soothingly, "I could make some onion soup. I read some place that onion soup is good for — for a hangover."

John said, "Thanks, no, dear." Why did her voice always seem to grate, in the morning?

"Tomato juice?"

"Just black coffee, dear."

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'dear,' " she said quietly.

He stared at her, startled for the moment from contemplation of his own misery. Finally, "And — why — not?"

"Because you don't really mean it. I'm your wife, but I'm not 'dear' to you and you know it. We don't need to pretend, John."

He continued to stare at her, wondering why she didn't stir him, even in his present mood. Fair-haired, slim, lovely and composed, an attractive and completely feminine woman. They'd been married seven years.

He said, "Let's not talk about *that*, now."

"All right." She poured his coffee. "Do you want to — talk about last night?"

He sipped his coffee. "I wish I could. I was on a space ship, a job with more power than I ever thought any rocket would achieve. I saw some things you wouldn't believe."

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"You *really* saw them? Or . . ." She stopped.

"Or was I so pie-eyed I thought I saw them — is that what you were going to ask?"

"More or less."

"I wasn't that drunk. I couldn't have been that drunk and handled a ship off the Inter-Planet Beam."

"Off the Beam . . .?" Her voice was a whisper.

He tilted his chin. "Off the Beam. I was off the beam, too." Something stabbed at the back of his neck, and he swallowed another gulp of coffee. "I saw a planetesimal. I met the people. Happy people. *Very* happy people. They call the place Joy."

"Place . . .?"

"The planetesimal. Has an enveloping anti-grav field, so it's not drawn into this planet. Understand?"

"No."

He opened his mouth to explain, and closed it.

She said, "Try not to be so *insufferably* patient. Try to pretend we're living in sin, or something. I'm not that unattractive." She took a deep breath. "And don't talk about anything as absurd as an anti-gravity field. That's one of those myths."

His voice was grittily calm. "All right. Try to remember I'm — sick this morning." He stared at her evenly. "This planetesimal, this Joy, has gravity for humans but the gravity is blocked at a three mile limit, so it will not be attracted to other bodies. It has no orbit; it is directed by the scientific clique who govern it. Am I boring you?"

"Hardly. You're incredible."

"To go on, it was off the Beam, so it's not a story you'll repeat, I hope. Anyway, this clique not only runs everything; they supply everything. Which leaves nothing for the citizens to do, but —" He shrugged.

"But drink?"

He shrugged again.

She shook her head, looking at him thoughtfully. "No wonder it's off the beam. John — were you, did you —? Oh, never mind. If you did, I don't want to know it."

"I was drunk," he said smugly, and sipped his coffee.

"And dreaming," she added. "I'll settle for that. I won't accept the — You were dreaming."

"Maybe." He rubbed the back of his neck. "Maybe."

Her voice was sharper. "You're quite a pilot, aren't you?"

"Good enough. Forty missions against Venus. I guess that's pretty fair. The Venusians must have thought I was. They had a standing offer of —"

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"I know," she interrupted. "I've heard the story before. Nineteen times before we were married and 63 times since."

"I would have to marry a mathematician," he said sourly. "With physicians and physicists to choose from, with chemists and bio-chemists, with —"

"But you're not *that* good," she interrupted again.

His head throbbed. "I'm not how good?"

"Good enough to handle a ship off the beam. Not a *standard* ship."

"Look, it wasn't a standard ship, as I said before. It was a —" He paused, his mouth still open. And in his intelligent, now blood-shot eyes, horror took the place of indignation.

Her apprehension matched his. "John — it was a dream, it has to be. You didn't steal a government — Oh, John!"

"Oh, Lord," he said.

Only government ships could travel off the Inter-Planet Beam. The penalty for stealing a government ship was death. And he hadn't — In this morning's fuzzy stupidity, he hadn't even realized what . . .

He stared. She stared.

Then mutely, like one of the lower robots, she reached over to snap on the news-screen.

The voice came on before the face: "— is the first instance of its kind since the death penalty was instituted for this crime. The ship was found out near Gower Gulley this morning, by Regional Space Officer Helmuth Klump, who immediately reported his find to Earth Headquarters. All the planets have been informed —"

John didn't hear the rest; what he'd heard had been too much. He saw the beefy, pompous face of the announcer and was aware of the words without actually connecting them.

Sally asked, "Where and how would you get your hot little hands on a government vehicle?"

"I don't know." He rubbed his forehead, felt the sweat running down his wrists. "Sally, I'd better —" He closed his eyes.

"Run? Run away? And arouse suspicion? And where would you run to, John?"

He shrugged.

"I've no idea," he said.

But he did have; he had a very good idea. He looked up and squared his shoulders. "You're right. There's no place to run to. Unless things get hotter, I'd better just stick tight."

He had decided that things were going to get hotter. At least, Sally was going to think so. . . .

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At the airport, where John was publicity director, Pete Furlo was waiting in his office. Pete was young and full of ideas, and John's assistant.

This morning he said, "I've got the Mars problem licked, I'm sure, John."

Mars had proven to be no tourist attraction at all. Despite the planting of oxygaling which had resulted in sufficient oxygen supply, despite the irrigation which the pioneers had established from the polar caps, Mars was strictly a colonist's haven. And colonists are one-trip passengers.

Now John said, "You've got the problem licked?" He smiled. "No bugs in the idea, I'm sure."

"I'll give it to you in a word," Pete said. "Gambling."

John was quiet, studying his assistant. Finally, "That would do it. But —" He was silent. "Yes, that would really do it. It's not heavily enough colonized to run into local opposition, but it would still be a lobbyist's miracle, to get it through the Galactic Assembly."

"That can be done," Pete said flatly. "I've been talking to some of the assemblymen."

"Politics?" John shook his head. "Pete, politicians are bad lads to tangle with."

"They're people, like anybody else, John."

"Technically, they're people, but not like anybody else — unless you include Venusians."

Pete's young face took on a stubborn cast. "The ones I met were swell guys."

"They were on your side," John pointed out patiently. "It's the ones on the other side who'll make you wish you were never born. There isn't a single vice you have they won't exaggerate, nor any mistake you ever made they won't dig up."

"I'm a man of no vices and few mistakes," Pete said smilingly. "You sound — frightened, John."

"Frightened? Me? A man who completed 40 missions against Venus?"

"Not me," Pete answered. "I risk my all for Stellar Airlines, the pathway to the stars. Forty missions against Venus, and you're afraid of a lousy politician or two. Oh, John —" He shook his head.

"I am *not* afraid. I don't know where you got such a screwball idea."

Silence. Outside a Jupiter saucer was landing, and they both watched it. Then, on John's desk, a light winked and his secretary's nasal voice said, "Mr. Resin to see you, John."

R. J. Resin was the Chairman of the Board. R. J. Resin wouldn't come down to see John unless something was sadly amiss, unless he was on the warpath.

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Quick perspiration beaded John's forehead, and he looked at Pete beseechingly. "What could he — I —"

Pete said, "I'd better duck out."

"No," John said hoarsely. "Please, Pete, no —"

"Okay," Pete said, and now there was a strange smile on his face. Perhaps it was meant to be comforting, but it looked smug.

R. J. Resin wasn't a man to waste words. He was a big man and a direct one, without sentiment.

He stood a moment in the office doorway, glaring at John, and then he said, "*You* stole that government ship, last night."

John opened his mouth, and closed it.

"You admit it?"

John opened his mouth — and Pete said, "It was all innocent fun, Mr. Resin. There was nothing — criminal about it. You see, General Tankard lent us that ship."

"Us —?" John said, and "Us?" R. J. said, and both of them were staring at Pete.

Poise, the assistant had. Assurance, he had, and his voice was smoothly ingratiating. "I was along. John probably doesn't remember it; he was a bit drunker than I was. But there was no harm done."

R. J. looked between them, and settled on John. "He was along?"

"I — er — uh, I —" John said.

"He doesn't remember," Pete put in smilingly. "Poor John isn't much of a drinking man. He was rather incoherent, last night. But I drove him home from Gower Gully, this morning, after we deserted the ship." He paused. "And I'm sure nothing will come of the incident, despite the current hysteria. General Tankard will see that *nothing* comes of it, not the slightest repercussion."

Silence. Pete was facing R. J. squarely, and there was complete command in his attitude.

"Tankard," R. J. said. "*General* Tankard. Hmmmmm. You boys do associate with important people, don't you? Glad to see that, very glad. Stellar can use the — influence, you know." His smile was brief. "Well, boys will be boys."

He departed.

John looked at Pete. "You don't know General Tankard from a bale of Plutonian hay."

Pete shrugged. "Don't I?" His voice was indifferent.

"And you weren't with me."

"All right, I wasn't. *You're* the boss."

"That's right. What's the angle, Pete? What's the pitch?"

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Pete took a deep breath. "John — did I get you out of a tight spot?"

Silence, for seconds. A nerve twitched in John's forehead. Then he said wearily, "I'm sorry. Yes, you did. I'm sorry, Pete, and — thanks." He looked out at the busy field. "Loyalty seems to be an out-moded virtue. I appreciate your — lying for me."

"Call it a lie if you want, John." A pause. "I had a date, here, with Assemblyman Andrews, at 10:30. It's 10:20 now." Another pause. "He's anxious to get your reaction."

"I'll be here," John said. "He'll get it."

When Pete left, to check the Mars file, John sat for a moment behind his huge desk, thinking back on the incident just passed.

Pete had been quickly loyal, sticking his own neck out there along with John's. Why, why, why —?

In the casualty compartment of his news-sifter, he found a few reports of accidents on rival space lines and he spent a few minutes fashioning these into news accounts that would point up the Stellar record. It was a tricky business; newscasters were suspicious of publicity handouts and he had to avoid direct mention of Stellar.

He shoved the mass of wordage into Pete's scan-typer, and glanced at his watch. He had time for a quick one.

In the flight deck bar, he sat nursing a bourbon and soda and trying to remember last night. The girl he remembered, a red-headed, slim and ready lass with beautiful long legs and lovely shoulders. He'd met her at — let's see — Ecstasy Inn, that was it.

And what a spot. The dance floor big enough to review a division in, the promenade overlooking the green plains of Vesta. Even tiny Vesta had dwarfed Joy; the planetesimal must not be much larger than Oahu.

But that was last night. Where was it now? Within the void between Minus and Fantasar, between Aronda and Velier. It couldn't possibly travel any more than that in a few hours. That would be a cinch to find in — in a government ship.

The thought came to the front, born at the breakfast table, nourished by the minutes since. If he should leave Sally, which was a serious offense since passage of the Jones-Goerke Act, he would be safe only on Joy. The Galactic Assembly had no control over Joy.

He swallowed the rest of his drink and looked up to see Pete and Assemblyman Andrews coming across from the lobby.

A thin man, Assemblyman Andrews, and intense. Definitely on his way up in government service.

He shook John's hand cordially, and said, "This is as good a place as any, unless you'd prefer your office?"

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"This will do," John said.

They sat down, and Andrews' voice was genial. "Great idea you've got John."

"Pete's idea," John corrected him. As though Andrews didn't know.

Andrews' glance was steady. "You've some objections, though?"

John didn't answer.

Pete said casually, "He's concerned about — political attack."

"Oh," Andrews said. "That would be my cross, John. How would you come into it?"

John fought for poise. "I suppose I wouldn't. Unless Stellar's backing leaked out, which could very well happen. There's the moral issue too, you know."

Andrews' smile was deprecating. "Oh, come, that would hardly bother *you*, John."

John tried to read the mind behind that smiling face. "Just what did you mean by that?"

Andrews added a shrug to the smile. "Well, none of us are — deacons, I suppose."

John continued to stare at Andrews and Andrews continued to smile. Pete coughed. There was a threat in Andrews' smile.

John looked away first. He asked, "Why all the heat? You holding some Martian realty options, Andrews?"

The politician shook his head. "Stellar is. They've even got some they're thinking of selling. Or using as payment."

John looked at Pete, and back at the politician. "You boys have been working, haven't you? I see what you mean about not being deacons." He looked back at Pete. "You didn't, by any chance, go over my head on this, did you?"

Pete colored. "I've — talked about it with R. J." His chin lifted. "Casually."

John saw the why, now, of Pete's loyalty. He didn't want R. J.'s wrath to gimmick any deals of his own. And now, with his lie, he thought he had a sword to hold over John.

He sat there quietly, the blood pounding in his temples. Then, "Considering all that, I don't understand why you're wasting your time with me. Out for my job, are you, Pete?"

Pete's face changed from red to white. "You know better than that. I'll resign, as of now, if that'll prove anything to you."

John said quietly, "I'll accept the resignation, as of now. I guess, gentlemen, we have nothing further to discuss."

They both stood up then. Pete looked sick, Andrews calculating.

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Andrews seemed to be picking his words very carefully. "I'm sure you'll find you've made a serious mistake, John. Good day."

They walked out together.

John went back to his office after another drink. They thought they had him; they didn't know about Joy. That was his haven, that was his ace. And the red-head would be waiting.

They must have thought him a deluded lush, ready for the axe. He worked steadily at Pete's old job, feeding the copy into the publicity channel for system coverage.

At 3:30, Sally phoned. Her voice was quiet. "Andrews was here, John. He knows about last night."

"He — couldn't."

"He does. And he wants you to hire Pete again. Why did you fire him, John?"

"That doesn't matter. You're sure about Andrews?"

"He said he can prove it. He wants Pete back and he wants to go ahead with the Mars project, whatever that is." A pulse. "He said you should call him when you came to your senses."

"All right. I may or may not be home for dinner. Don't plan on it."

"John, you're not going to — to run —"

He hung up without answering. He was a man with a single loyalty, and that was to himself. He'd come into the Stellar job as a Venusian war veteran, and been given complete freedom so far as the publicity went. He wasn't a man who had learned to compromise.

And now that punk Furlo kid and Andrews were out to get him. He stood by the massive windows on the port side, watching the huge ships take off and land. What did a man want. Not responsibility nor labor nor the restricting corrosion of marriage.

All a man wanted was happiness. All a man wanted, to pun it, was Joy. And here was a Joy which was no illusion, despite the disbelief of them all. Waiting, was a concrete Joy. Between Minus and Fantasar, between Aronda and Velier . . .

A X-14L7 came spinning in from the west. Government ship, and a short range job, but adequate for the trip. Fast, a pursuit ship, and Joy would be well beyond its point of no return. But who would ever want to return from Joy?

And the X-14L7 had no beam control. It was a government ship; he couldn't return from Joy — *if he stole that.*

How had that thought come? Well, where were his loyalties? A veteran; he owed nothing to this world. This world owed him happiness. Which he meant to have.

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In the subterranean locker room, now, the pilot would be taking off his geneskul uniform. He had an hour to kill, on earth, and he'd want to get out of that bulky suit.

That bulky — *all-enveloping* suit. That perfect disguise.

But the pilot —? Yes, John, the pilot, what about him? He'd fight — to the death. Pilots were notoriously loyal. They were constantly on guard. They slept in guarded domes and carried an atomic pistol off duty and on.

John opened the drawer of his desk and looked at his own personal weapon, relic of the Venusian war, of 40 missions in which he had killed and killed and killed. . . .

It was a Fostgern ray semi-automatic. It killed silently and immediately and there were a lot of empty lockers in the pilots' room. . . .

He was a fair youth, and tall. He turned from his ablutions at the rinse stand, and smiled at John. He was so damnably young.

He said, "Quite time, isn't it? All the other pilots have taken off?"

"All," John said. "Just the two of us." He brought out the Fostgern and saw the youth's eyes grow wide.

"Say," the lad said, "that's not to play with, Mr. —"

A flash, burned flesh, a noiseless, quite horrible quivering of the young body and a soft *thump* on the marquisite floor.

The stench of the burned flesh seemed to hang in John's nostrils long after he had stowed the blackened body in a locker way over near the heating room.

The memory of the lad's startled glance seemed to burn into his brain, and the smell of his own perspiration penetrated the burned flesh scent.

John forced his mind from that, buckling himself into the huge pressure-resistant geneskul space suit.

Behind the plastic visor, he looked at himself in the mirror and saw the reflection of his own eyes. Some apprehension was mirrored there, but that was only a part of the picture. There was no horror, no remorse. There was the faint tinge of apprehension and the dominating cast of anticipation. He had crossed the line, now; no indecision fretted him.

Ahead was nothing but Joy.

He'd been drunk then, but he knew. Where it was and how to get there. He took a deep breath. And how to live, once he got there.

At the huge lead barrier, the guard smiled and gave him the thumb-up signal for "happy flight." John nodded and went on purposefully toward the X-14L7.

As the door closed behind him, as the hydraulic pressure arm swung it tight, he seemed to come home at last. He knew the ship, an advanced model of his own Venus experiences. It was a cinch.

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He set the rada-coordinator, checked the field chart above the blast-buttons. Ready to go, fueled and checked and he had the all-clear signal in the guide-panel.

A hum, a blast, the belt of his safety harness digging into the non-flexible plastic of the suit. A sharp, stabbing pain behind his eyes, and peace.

Free flight. Only the clicks of the rada-coordinator as the course was set, as the glistening saucer went spinning out toward the stars.

The moon and Mars and the black void of Gestara's further side, and the silent, effortless travel through the Barclay asteroids.

And now, ahead, he could see the gleam of Fantasar, growing at an unbelieveable rate. He set the electronic scope for all-angle coverage as the glitter of Fantasar went by to his right.

Overhead the buzz of his coordinator told him he was nearing his destination.

Ahead was Minus, clear as a harvest moon, and to his right was Aronda, to his left Velier.

Far behind him was the world and its responsibilities, the wife who grated on him, the job that kept him going, going, going, all the time, chiseling and conniving, fixing this and angling for that. Behind him was the world he couldn't adjust to, and wouldn't *need* to, now.

Another buzz from the coordinator told him he was beyond his point of no return.

John scarcely heard it as he searched the scope. There was no place in infinity where it could be, but here. There was no place in infinity, *now*, for him but the destination he sought avidly in the scope. His landmarks were perfectly framed, behind, before and to all sides.

But in all that void, where it had to be, there was nothing. In all that cold and desolate space there was not a sign of Joy. . . .

Coming . . . *in our next issue (on the stands just after New Year's Day)*

THE TIME WATCHER, a moving story of primitive powers by that great authority on the American Indian, Oliver La Farge;

plus an episode in Gavagan's Bar which casts new light on culinary arts, and stories by such favorites of F&SF readers as Zenna Henderson, Mildred Clingerman, Philip K. Dick, Christopher Wood, R. Bretnor, J. T. M'Intosh, Chad Oliver and others.

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Now it is Christmas and to insure your proper measure of Yuletide enjoyment it is incumbent upon us to give you the traditional Christmas ghost story. So here it is, traditional but not wholly conventional, for Mr. Kirk's bookseller-hero, living as he does amid the ghosts of men's thoughts and words, is a protagonist peculiarly likely to encounter spectral visitants and uniquely prepared to accept them on their own terms.

What Shadows We Pursue

by RUSSELL KIRK

"ELEVEN THOUSAND BOOKS," said Mrs. Corr, mildly and factually. In her clear old voice lingered no tone of affection for the vast dusty library, no hint of comprehension of its dignity. "Or nearly 11,000. Dr. Corr had Sarah make a card for every one. Why, that's less than 30 cents for each, isn't it, Mr. Stoneburner?" With a species of gentle calculation, she let her dim glance slide along the interminable Georgian spines of *A Universal History*. "My . . . but I suppose that's the best we can hope."

From thick, faded carpet to moulded-plaster ceiling eighteen feet above, Dr. Corr's books staunchly filled the walls of the long room. Beyond the archway was another room nearly as large, and there books not only jammed the shelves but lay in heaps upon tables and were monumentally stacked upon the floor. The grand, chill corridor upon which this second room opened also was choked with books, while the shorter hall at right angles, leading from the corridor to what had been Dr. Corr's bedroom, held bound volumes of the *Edinburgh Review* and *Harper's Monthly*. Nor did these comprehend the whole of the collection, for the gigantic skylighted attic, up beyond the graceful curve of the mahogany stair rail, was a storehouse for countless periodicals never bound but neatly tied together in volumes; for obscure governmental reports, for a welter of cheap and damaged editions that Dr. Corr should have sold as waste. But of course Dr. Corr had never parted with a book, however wretchedly printed or wretchedly written. He would as soon have sold his daughter — sooner, old Mr. Hanchett said. Hanchett, who had been Stoneburner's cataloguer for five years and cataloguer to other booksellers decades before that, was addicted to uncharitable judgments. And for all these books, William Stoneburner, book dealer, was now writing a check.

"Not much more than a quarter each," replied Stoneburner, with his

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apologetic smile, blowing upon the check. "If you could find a man who wanted the collection for himself, Mrs. Corr, he could give you more than any of us dealers. But who'd have the room for them, in these times? Or the money? Or the leisure to read?" Stoneburner was pardonably vain of the mien with which he could deliver his genteel and recurrent sigh of *in hoc tempori*. It sat well upon a man who inhabited the valley of the shadow of books, even though he dwelt there as a bourgeois.

"A friend told me," murmured Mrs. Corr, rocking her little chair softly and inspecting her shiny little shoes of a fashion 40 years obsolete, "that the old Bibles might be worth a great deal, just by themselves. There's a man somewhere who collects old Bibles, this friend said." Despite her having tucked the check into her work-basket only this minute, already she was displaying the recriminations so frequently encountered among sellers of books. Stoneburner knew the mood and was tolerant.

"I'm sure some people must collect Bibles," he assured the venerable Mrs. Corr in a voice nearly as artless as her own. "Here's what you and I'll do: you can have all the old Bibles — put them aside and keep them, and sell them to someone else, if you like. I own too many old Bibles. The price for the library will stand. But I do want to take just one Bible — the Cranmer. I think I know where I can sell that. The rest are yours."

A harsh tone, neither masculine nor really feminine, broke in upon this colloquy: the voice of Miss Sarah Corr, who had entered by the door at Stoneburner's back. "What Bible is that, Mr. Stoneburner?" She moved ponderously toward the window seat where a half-dozen folio and quarto Bibles clustered, a black dust thick upon their exposed top edges. "You'll get a lot of money for it, I imagine?"

She poked unfeelingly the thick book in vellum that Stoneburner indicated.

And Miss Sarah Corr turned her set smile upon Mr. Stoneburner. She was larger than Stoneburner, larger than most men, a massive spinster. Fifty? Sixty? Had she ever been younger? Not to judge by her dress, which was as timeless as her frail mother's. To be beamed upon by Miss Sarah Corr was not altogether pleasant. When Stoneburner first had seen that broad smile, he had been standing upon the steps of the austere stone house of Dr. Corr, a house sombre even on an Indian summer evening, and Miss Corr had opened to his ring with some caution, and then had said, with that peculiar smile, "You're the gentleman that buys books? The one with the advertisement in the telephone directory?"

A month gone, that evening. The month had been a time of delicate negotiation with Mrs. Corr and Miss Corr, two recluses mightily ignorant of the contents of these 11,000 books, mightily afraid of losing a fortune. It was a

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good library, but there was no fortune in it; the library of a man who read, not of a man who collected.

"Sixty or seventy dollars, Miss Corr," Stoneburner said, unruffled. "Only that for a Cranmer Bible. On all these shelves, perhaps there are six or eight books people will pay that much for. The rest — why, they're good books, the kind of books Dr. Corr read. I think I'd have liked to know Dr. Corr."

"Yes, yes?" murmured Mrs. Corr, rocking politely. She accepted the observation as a conventional compliment, apparently, and volunteered no comment upon her husband. Her *late* husband, Stoneburner had thought when initially he browsed through this house; but while the Corr women spoke of the doctor as one forever gone, they never seemed quite to use the past tense. So Stoneburner had inquired of old Hanchett, who knew something of every man within this century that had bought very many books in the city.

"Dr. Corr is one of those chaps that wither up and the wind blows away," old Hanchett had said with a certain relish, being himself invincibly portly and rubicund. "Haven't seen him in many a year. Books swallowed him, you know. He let his friends go because he liked the books better, and he came out into the light less and less . . . Well, you've seen his wife and daughter. Books cost; the Corr women had to manage with one new dress a year, or every other year. And then they gave up their card-parties. As time went on, Corr decided his women's mission in life was to make catalog cards for his books and do a bit of dusting. He used to take his wife for an hour's walk after supper; then back to his library, and she to her parlor to sew, until it was time for sleep — Corr to his room (books helter-skelter on the floor), she to hers.

"The daughter? Oh, the girl was crazy to begin with. You'll see it, Mr. Stoneburner; she has her little ways. Maybe she was one of the things that drove Corr away from people into books. Corr was allergic — allergic to people. Ah, but books, though. . . . I'll hand it to him there. No, it's been years since I had a word with him. As he dried up, even the evening walk got to be too long a vacation from his books. I wonder if he has books where he is now? I don't know exactly when they took him away, but Mrs. Corr told my cousin that they sent him out West for his health. They don't seem to expect him back. His *health*, eh?" (And Hanchett had tapped a plump finger against his forehead, uncharitably.) "One way ticket, Mr. Stoneburner. And is the money nearly gone now, too? I suppose it costs to keep the doctor in the West for his *health*. Why, the doctor would be a screaming devil if he knew the library was being sold. He was a tall, white husk of a man, decent spoken, a gold mine for the dealers."

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And Mrs. Corr rocked, soothing away this reference of Stoneburner's to her husband as she and her daughter were wont to pass over such comments — nothing of pride in their manner, nothing of resentment. "Yes, yes? Well, now — the house will seem almost empty with the books gone, won't it? All sorts of people are looking for places to live these days, I hear. I suppose we could rent part of this great big house of ours. But who would want to live here? It's too dirty." And Mrs. Corr laughed her delicate little laugh and Miss Corr added her deep chuckle.

Candid, this. The Corrs were not without a certain withered wit. Undoubtedly the Corr house was too dirty for anyone but the Corrs. From the parlor ceiling, the paper hung down in festoons that obscured the gilt-framed paintings on the walls. Plaster was falling in the attic, for the roof had begun to leak in Dr. Corr's time. One suspected that Dr. Corr's allergy toward humanity extended even to roofers and plumbers and paperers. Certainly utilitarian improvements had been installed in his house only with extreme tardiness. The lighting, for instance. Apparently possessed of a reactionary confidence that the days of high old Roman virtue would return, Dr. Corr had cherished three systems of illumination, each ready to function at a pinch. Candelabra and kerosene lamps were to be seen, tarnished and topsy-turvy, in this corner or that; gas jets still protruded from plaster or panelling, and could be lit; but the actual artificial light came from naked bulbs dangling like strangled felons from the ceilings — many of them the early bamboo filament sort that terminate in a glassy spike, since the Corrs lived in three or four rooms and turned on these other switches scarcely more than twice in a month.

Not a practical man, Dr. Corr; nor was Mrs. Corr a practical woman; yet she seemed to have a canny eye for a dollar, possibly out of necessity. Her rocking uninterrupted, she continued, "Now, Mr. Stoneburner, I don't suppose you mean the books in the attic are included, do you? Those still belong to us?"

Stoneburner certainly had thought they were his. All the same, they were trash, except for the periodicals, which needed binding. And it was unpleasant to refuse a crumb of victory to an impractical lady in her eighties. He was about to say, "You're very welcome to them," when Mr. Markashian entered. Mr. Markashian had overheard something of the conversation. Mr. Markashian had a habit of overhearing, Stoneburner reflected. "Of course they belong to us, Mother," pronounced Markashian, with emphasis.

Mrs. Corr obviously was not Markashian's mother, for he was a Levantine; despite the Armenian name, he had more the look of an Anatolian Greek. Nevertheless, he was her son-in-law, a public accountant from Newark, firm in a decided opinion that he knew the world, of which he deserved

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well. "He never dared show up while the doctor was in the house," Hanchett had told Stoneburner. "He married Lilly Corr on the sly. Both of them got cheated." But the vanishing of the doctor from the scene, and the scent of a sale of family assets, had drawn the worldly Mr. Markashian from his accustomed pursuits in New Jersey. He left his wife behind to tend the children, informing her that family honor and prosperity now were his responsibility. As a man of business, Mrs. Corr and Sarah Corr appeared to reverence him unwillingly; as man of business and simple man, Stoneburner loathed him. Markashian's vulturine profile and flaccid hand had poked into the book sale incessantly; it was clear to Stoneburner that Markashian did not want the books to be sold at all, preferring the chance of inheriting the library to the chance of inheriting a remnant of the cash. Mr. Markashian rejoiced in the best suits and the worst manners Stoneburner had observed for some years.

"You understand that, don't you?" went on Markashian, turning to Stoneburner. "The books in the attic don't go with the others. There's very valuable property upstairs."

"What money you can extract from the books in the attic," Stoneburner told him sourly, "I make you a present of."

"That's settled, then," said Markashian, on a note of triumph. "What's the book you're holding, Sarah?"

Miss Sarah Corr gave Markashian one of her long stares, and then a long smile, and suddenly came out with, "An old Bible worth $30. Mr. Stoneburner wants this one." A single bond of sympathy united Stoneburner and Miss Corr: distrust of Markashian.

"What, this lovely old Bible?" groaned Markashian. "An heirloom. Gutenburg Bible, isn't it? It mustn't leave the family."

"It's not a Gutenburg, I'm sorry to tell you, Mr. Markashian, and it's my property. I can't have more books extracted from my purchase. Would you rather return the check to me, Mrs. Corr?" He extended his hand toward her. Though a cheery little man, Stoneburner was capable of firmness.

Patting her workbasket in alarm, Mrs. Corr declared she had no intention of breaking the bargain. "Everything but the other Bibles, and the books in the attic, and the few things Mr. Markashian took for himself yesterday — everything else is yours, Mr. Stoneburner. My, what a strange house this will be with the books gone! You'll take them all out yourself, Mr. Stoneburner? You won't bring anyone to help? We'd rather carry them for you ourselves than have strangers running upstairs."

It was a matter of consequence with her and with Sarah Corr, who turned her stagnant look on him. The intensity of the appeal rather embarrassed Stoneburner and seemed to surprise even Markashian. But Stoneburner al-

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ready had agreed to the stipulation. It was natural enough; dirty though they admitted their house to be, they hardly would want it inspected.

"All 11,000, Mrs. Corr — I'll lug them to the truck myself. I'll need a whole week, off and on. We'll have to take care with some of the folios; they're shaky. Heavy things, books — I'll be stiff when it's done. Will it suit you if I start at 9 sharp tomorrow morning?"

Sarah Corr went with him to the double-bolted front door, through the vaulted corridor where two walnut clocks ticked alternately amid the ashes of magnificence, and let him out into the night. "Mr. Stoneburner!" she said, as he turned away. He swung back to that ponderous, ever-beaming face with the close cropped gray hair that turned it almost masculine. "You've seen the attic. You won't need to go there again, after tonight?"

"Since those books aren't mine, no," said Stoneburner.

"That's very nice of you," Miss Corr answered, closing the door. He listened to her bolt it; he hesitated a moment on the steps, wondering whether he should stop at a restaurant for coffee on his way home. As he loitered, it occurred to him that he had not heard Sarah Corr's slow stride back through the corridor. She must be standing just inside the door to make sure he was gone. Stoneburner grimaced, and went.

A light, covered truck specially equipped with wooden racks was the property of Stoneburner's Bookshop. And this Stoneburner parked close by the porch of the Corr house next morning, ready to commence moving one tier of the books in the library proper. Greeting him with her eternal hesitant commendation of the weather, Mrs. Corr admitted him. She wore that invariable black dress which hid her ankles — a dowdy figure, but not vulgar. Back into her parlor she tottered, and Stoneburner went his quiet way up the circling stairs to the library. As he trod the stair carpet, he heard feet hastily descending from a higher level — the attic, of course; and he took them for Mr. Markashian's feet. But when he reached the library floor, nothing of Markashian was to be seen. Perhaps he had ducked into one of the chilly rooms off the corridor. Markashian was given to judicious ducking.

Methodically dusting the top of each volume with a piece of flannel, Stoneburner took the books from a tier of shelves close to the window and stacked them in tidy heaps convenient for carrying downstairs. A gap appeared upon one of the shelves. The morning before, a set of Bacon had reposed there, and Stoneburner had assumed it was part of his purchase. But finding it gone in the afternoon, he had inquired of Mrs. Corr, to be told that "Mr. Markashian thought it ought to be his own — useful in his work." Stoneburner had waived the matter.

A decrepit little ladder enabled Stoneburner to reach the higher shelves;

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he balanced upon it, dusting. In this volume or that, Dr. Corr had inserted neat slips of paper to mark favorite passages; small checks in the margins pointed to some mighty line or kernel of wit. Stoneburner, himself a leisurely man, now and then opened a book to glance at these passages and generally was much taken with the doctor's choice. He began to form an image of Dr. Corr other than the "sneer of cold command" that Hanchett's description had left in his mind. A solitary man, this Dr. Corr; but then, how could he be other than alien to his mousy wife and queer daughter and infuriating son-in-law? Indeed, Stoneburner experienced the beginnings of awe for a noble mind in provincial obscurity. Corr's family may have reciprocated his disdain with that ferocious envy the vulgar feel toward the proud. Bound to them he may have been; but they, until now had been his slaves.

Stoneburner took down Fuller's *The Holy State and the Profane State* — a fine glossy Seventeenth century binding. "Cesare Borgia, His Life," Corr had underlined in the index, and had marked the page by inserting a note card. The bookseller ran his eye along the passages checked: "The throne and the bed cannot severally abide partners. . . ." "For he could neither lengthen the land nor lessen the sea in Italie. . . ." "He preferred the state of his body to the body of his state." Why, even a touch of humor in this Dr. Corr. Stoneburner put the quarto upon his dusted stack; and, having done with this shelf, glanced at the books on the window ledge. There was a gap among them.

What sort of fool did they think him? For the Cranmer Bible was gone. He was used to pilferage and aware that the average person with whom he dealt thought a single volume could hardly be missed among so many. But in the present instance, he had specifically claimed the Cranmer for his own the previous day, and it was too bulky and too valuable for them to suppose he would wholly forget it. This was more than Stoneburner was disposed to endure. Though angry, he was self-possessed, and he turned to face the room, wondering if they could have tucked the book into some drawer. They would not dare hide it absolutely, since that was theft; more probably they would endeavor to lose it in some pile of trash, hoping he might pass it by. And so he recalled the steps he had heard briskly descending from the attic when, an hour before, he had entered the house.

Mrs. Corr was downstairs, no doubt, and Sarah Corr with her; Markashian — for surely it was he who had scuttled from the attic — would hardly be inclined to face him at this moment, even supposing him only across the corridor. A quiet survey of the attic could do no harm. Stoneburner walked into the corridor and turned up the spiralling stair. The door at the top stood ajar. Standing on the last step and resting his arm upon the balustrade, Stoneburner sent an exploratory glance within. One enor-

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mous room, this attic, into which the sun penetrated dully through a cupola skylight. Sundry boxes and articles of old furniture were scattered about the center of the floor, but Dr. Corr had kept the place fairly clear of trash so that he could get to his shelves of magazines along the walls. Right opposite the door, in line with Stoneburner's eyes, was a broad tier of worthless novels, no doubt got by Dr. Corr with other books at some auction.

These novels had been disturbed. Six or seven had fallen to the floor, and another gap indicated that more had tumbled behind the shelves. Had Markashian been sliding the Cranmer among this trash and been interrupted at his game? Stoneburner raised one foot to the final step of the staircase.

But he was prevented. Sharp and resistless, a grip pinned his arm against the balustrade. Half a second he paused to quiet his leaping nerves, and then looked round to see Miss Sarah Corr at his back, her great hand clamped upon his wrist, her face set in that inimitable smile. Beneath it, Stoneburner knew, her teeth were gritted fiercely together. The smile grew broader. As it spread, her fingers dug into his wrist as if to find a passage through. She must have tiptoed painstakingly after him, weasel behind goose. And in her face there was no more of mercy than of sanity.

"Sarah!" whispered Mrs. Corr from the foot of the staircase, and commenced laboriously to climb toward them. At that soft cry, Miss Sarah Corr relaxed her clutch, and the smile sank into something nearer humanity, but still she did not speak.

Mrs. Corr ascended the infinite way to their side, and said to him, most politely and casually, "Did you need something in the attic, Mr. Stoneburner?" Her old eyes cried out some awful disturbance. But what?

"Someone seems to have been looking over the Cranmer Bible," Stoneburner answered, a bit of a shake in his voice. "Do you suppose it might have been left up here by mistake?"

Embarrassment he had expected, perhaps shamed denial; but not this assuagement that came into the faces of the Corr women. "Oh, I'm sorry you have the trouble of looking for it," said Mrs. Corr with a tiny sigh. "Sarah and I will see if we can't help." And together they entered the attic.

To the left of the cupola skylight stood an imposing oak desk, a pile of old ledgers sprawled upon it. Stoneburner had noticed it before. But now the capacious drawers were pulled open, and bundles of letters and papers and photographs were tossed out of them and spread in confusion beside the ledgers. Sarah Corr drew a heavy breath, and Mrs. Corr glanced round the great room, and then they went at the desk with a sort of horror struck frenzy. Markashian's curiosity and covetousness extended beyond the library purchase to the property of his mother-in-law and sister-in-law, Stoneburner perceived; and doubtless his coming had interrupted Mar-

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kashian's prowling. As mother and daughter packed papers into drawers and cubby-holes with a gingerly haste, Stoneburner examined a photograph of a white haired, hollow cheeked man in a high collar that lay face upward. "Oh, Dr. Corr?" he inquired. "And these are his papers? A fine face."

They stopped sorting the violated papers and, wordless, looked at him. Sarah Corr raised a ponderous hand, and for a foolish moment he thought she intended to strike him; but instead she laid a finger upon her lips. Then she took the picture from his hand, turning it downward in the act, and laid it at the bottom of a drawer. This silence was contagious. Quite dumb, he stood by while they cleared away the confusion and shut the drawers and padded back toward the stairs. Then — "Ah, there's the Bible," said Stoneburner, seeing the quarto among a heap of the fallen novels and bending to retrieve it.

"My . . . Mr. Markashian must have been reading it," whispered Mrs. Corr, touching his coat sleeve — almost tugging at him. As he rose with the Bible, he observed a deep, an incalculably deep, space behind the gap from which the novels had tumbled.

"Why, what's happened here, Mrs. Corr? Have you lost some books down a hole?" He glanced into it. A hole, yes; a very great hole. A stair-well, with steps descending into a black abyss. This tier of shelves veiled, and sealed away, some disused back way into the attic. When he leaned forward for a closer look, his shoulder brushed against a tottering novel, and that book, too, fell backward from its place, bounding four or five steps into the filthy gloom and then flopping to its rest upon the last visible tread.

"Oh, stop!" The stifled scream came from Sarah Corr — the most nearly feminine expression he had heard from her. Her teeth were clenched but she seemed beyond smiling. Mrs. Corr ran a hand along her daughter's arm.

"Those are the old stairs for the maids, Mr. Stoneburner." Mrs. Corr looked not at him, but at the gap in the shelves. "They've been boarded since I don't know when. That's one reason we hoped you wouldn't need the books up here; the stairs would seem so odd without books to hide them. I'm glad the Bible wasn't lost. Do you need us to help you dust?" She took his arm; he helped her down the staircase, Sarah closing the attic door tightly behind them. There was no key in it, and Stoneburner suspected that nearly every key in the house had been mislaid long before.

In the library, with the Corr women gone down to the parlor, Stoneburner placed his resurrected Bible among the dusted books and went on with his stacking. A pox upon the book-ignorant folk who think every dog-eared Victorian New Testament a collector's treasure beyond the dreams of avarice! How often had he heard over his telephone some hesitant voice inquiring, "Do you buy old books? Really old books? What do you pay?

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I've got a *really* old Bible here. Authorized Version. London, *1884*. . . ."

All too strong was this spirit in that nervous pair the Corr women. He supposed they possessed redeeming virtues, however. They had seemed genuinely shocked at Markashian's profanation of the doctor's papers, presumably left sentimentally undisturbed ever since that gaunt shell of learning was sent somewhere into the West to linger out the little time still vouchsafed his wreck.

Stoneburner began taking down the volumes of a good set of Burke, their pages much marked and checked in the doctor's hand. Such pencillings impair the value of second hand books; but since Stoneburner read books as well as sold them, he did not complain overmuch. What sort of thing had Corr favored in Burke? He opened at random, and found a sentence doubly underlined: "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue."

Just so, old doctor. And true for bookworms like you and me, most especially — thus Stoneburner to himself. You even more than I, thank God. He put the volume with the others and stretched his tired arms. As he rested, there drifted faintly to him from the parlor below, through the doorway, a noise of voices full of anger. Well, had the Corr women had enough of that reluctantly revered Setebos of a son-in-law? The temptation to listen was overwhelming. Stoneburner leaned over the stair-well, where the words could be made out sufficiently.

". . . Only to look for the receipts, Mother." Yes, it was Markashian, half the cocksureness gone out of his tones, a Markashian taken aback at such vehemence over a bit of snooping.

Sarah Corr was answering him, or rather drowning him out. "Meddling, meddling, stirring things up! What do you want to poke into? What do you want to bring on us? Take your pictures, take your books, but don't poke. Take your money, but don't pry! No more sense . . ."

Markashian's reply was not wholly audible, but Stoneburner made out something about "no harm" and "a thousand miles away." Miss Corr roared down the oily voice again, her mother's low entreaty interrupting her. Then a door was shut and Stoneburner was prevented from hearing the rest; but this he caught before the colloquy was suppressed: "He always slept light, and he knew what you thought, and he could get into your dreams, and now he'll stir, the devil! That old, white, sneering, creepy devil! That's what!"

Was it the absent Dr. Corr thus described by his daughter? A nice family, a cordial family. Well, time for lunch, Stoneburner remembered. He skipped down the stairs and tapped at the parlor door and glanced within. The three were standing in the middle of the faded room, all taut at his knock. "Back at 2, if it's all right," Stoneburner told them and went his way. A nice family, a cheery family.

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Grimmest of all aspects of the book trade is the carrying of big volumes upstairs or down; and just this was to be Stoneburner's afternoon task. Commencing at 2, he kept at it faithfully for more than an hour. The Corrs and Markashian stayed out of his way, withdrawn in their parlor with its dingy plush chairs. As Stoneburner lugged perhaps the fortieth stack of volumes toward the front door, there came a crash above. Had the books piled in the library fallen? Hardly. He had arranged them neatly and the noise seemed more distant. From the parlor peered Markashian and Mrs. Corr.

"Perhaps some magazines in the attic toppled," Stoneburner suggested.

"My, no," said Mrs. Corr almost inaudibly, holding tight to the door jamb. Markashian went up the stairs; Mrs. Corr opened her mouth as if to call after him, but remained silent. So remarkable was the look she sent up the stair-well that Stoneburner waited for Markashian's report.

He came down with his accustomed strut. "Three shelves in the attic tipped over somehow," Markashian said. "Sarah ought to pick them up, before long — some of the shelves in front of the closed-off stairs."

Without word, Mrs. Corr vanished back into the parlor and Stoneburner went out with his load. But as he closed the house door behind him, he heard from the parlor what sounded like a gurgle; and it also sounded like Sarah Corr.

When 5 o'clock was chimed by those two clocks in the great corridor, Stoneburner still was lugging books to his truck. For a moment's rest, he seated himself in a rickety chair amid his dusted stacks and leafed through the first collected edition of Harrington, *Oceana* Harrington. "Dr. Randolph Corr," was written upon the fly-leaf with a flourish. "Purchased in Bristol, April 23, 1912." Ah, how everything passes! The doctor had spent his life amassing these dead men's fancies and here strove the undoer of the great library, dispersing in some days what Corr had built in as many decades. Perhaps it was as well that he had not known the doctor, Stoneburner mused; had he ever seen Corr, this work of destruction might have weighed upon his conscience. One man's pleasure, another's agony. . . . He lifted another stack, cradled it in his arms, and proceeded carefully downstairs.

Halfway down, an odor drifted round him. Undeniable — yes, gas. Stoneburner took the books to the stair foot and then tapped at the parlor.

"Who?" It was Mrs. Corr's voice, with a quaver. He entered. Mrs. Corr and Sarah Corr sat near to each other in two armchairs that faced the door. Markashian was not there. They looked at him with disturbing intensity.

"Could you have forgotten to turn off the kitchen range, Miss Corr? I smell gas somewhere."

"Gas, gas, gas," repeated Sarah Corr, almost with a shudder; but she did not rise and neither did her mother. Miss Corr did indeed have her ways.

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A heavy pause; then, from Mrs. Corr, "Mr. Markashian is out, Mr. Stoneburner. Might I ask you to see if the gas is turned on?"

Still they did not rise nor offer to assist, nor even to come so far as the door with him. And they watched him as he went into the corridor.

No, it was not the kitchen range. Now that he was on the ground floor, it seemed to Stoneburner that the faint gas odor drifted to him from above. And when he was on the library floor, it was stronger; and he thought it must come from the attic. Up the stair. As evening approached, the attic grew dark. The books still lay tumbled from those shelves before the sealed staircase. Yes, the odor was most strong in this great dim room. Three gas brackets in the attic. The first two were securely turned off — indeed, screwed tight so firmly that he could not budge them with his bare hands. But the third was open, the gas pouring from it. Stoneburner, closing the jet, reflected upon his good fortune not to have been smoking. Had Markashian turned on a light while up here, blown it out, and forgotten to twist the little knob below the mantle? A man unfamiliar with gas mantles might well blunder. But why hadn't Markashian switched on the single electric bulb suspended near the skylight? A most eccentric menage.

"Ah!" cried Stoneburner. And then, "Who is it?" For two or three books had fallen suddenly, an earthquake in the quiet of this attic room. He jerked about; but there was no one and surely there could have been no whisper. Yes, more books had dropped inward from those shelves below the dead end staircase. He reached into that hole back of the novels to retrieve whatever volumes had escaped downward. But they had tumbled beyond his reach — he could make them out, dimly, a half dozen steps down, one flopped open on its spine, its pages slowly slipping from right to left as if turned by fingers indiscernable.

"By God, no!" murmured Stoneburner, low.

For no one could have whispered, whispered ever so slyly and incoherently, out of the abyss. Stoneburner shrugged, dusted off his trouser knees and fixed his mind resolutely upon book prices current.

He trotted down to the library then, picked up his Cranmer Bible to ensure it against another misadventure, and proceeded to the ground-floor corridor. The Corr women still sat immobile in those lumpy chairs.

"Someone didn't close the jet in the attic, but it's all right now. I think I'll go to supper. Will it inconvenience you people if I finish moving the section I'm on about 7 o'clock or so?"

Sarah Corr had worn that smile so literally mordant, but without warning she said harshly, "Old devil! Old, white, creepy devil!"

Was it extreme age or a genuine power of dissimulation that enabled Mrs. Corr so placidly to gloss over her daughter's outbursts? At any rate, she

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nodded courteously to Stoneburner. "We'll be glad to have you back this evening." But ah, her eyes. And she did not accompany him to the porch. So Stoneburner left them in the moldy, tattered parlor.

Nearer 8 than 7 o'clock, Stoneburner pulled the tarnished bell-knob at Dr. Corr's house. No clang responded within, so far as he could tell; but he had always suspected that the bell did not work and that Miss Corr had known of his presence only because she had been peering through some window. He knocked and knocked again. No one came. And now he observed that the whole house was a darker mass of blackness against the night — not one window lit. Too early for bed, surely. Had the Corrs gone out? Annoying, he wanted to finish that particular tier. He tried the door. Unlocked, fortunately. Closing it behind him, he felt for a light switch, but could find none; everything in the Corr house was tucked out of sight.

Ah, well, he knew the stairs and could find the light in the library. Up he went. Inside the library doorway his fingers encountered the switch, and the old-fashioned bulb sent its aura into the corridor. And then, as he was about to cross the threshold into the sea of books, out of the corner of his eye he perceived something unfamiliar, something inappropriate, protruding between two posts of the stair-rail to the attic. A chill went through him. For the unfamiliar thing was a flabby hand. Behind it. . . . ? Whoever was behind it must be lying prone on the dark stairs. A quick-witted man, Stoneburner thought of the miniature flashlight attached to his keyring. Pulling it from his coat, he stepped to the stairs and sent the beam upward.

Markashian: nothing worse. Mr. Markashian lay with his unconscious face slanting downward, as if he had tripped and fallen — and the blood on one olive cheek seemed to confirm this. A closer look indicated that he was breathing, but thoroughly stunned. Kneeling in the dark by the accountant, Stoneburner listened for any step or rustle. But surely nothing moved within the house, and its stone walls barred the noise of the street. Mrs. Corr and Sarah Corr? Somehow Stoneburner dared not call out. He left Markashian and slipped with infinite care down the carpeted treads to the ground floor, every hint of a creak from the old boards an agony to his nerves, his own faint shadow on the papered wall a hunched menace.

Hesitating at the parlor door, he still could detect no sound. None? Why, perhaps the gentlest of sounds, not a hiss, not a swish, but the suggestion of a breath of air. Stoneburner did not want to turn that knob.

All the same, he turned it, and pushed open the door, and was met by a wave of gas, long pent within. Holding his breath, he fumbled for the light switch. This time luck was with him, and the light came on. Mrs. Corr still sat in her chair, but Sarah Corr had slumped out of hers upon the rug.

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Their faces were toward him, faces unmistakably dead, faces with such a look as drifts through dreams.

Several curious and unpleasant matters concerning Mr. Markashian's past were known to the police captain who arrived at Dr. Corr's house ten minutes after Stoneburner's call. No one could doubt that Markashian had been quite as odd, on occasion, as had been his connections by marriage, nor that his mind was seriously impaired at present, nor that his case required not a trial, but rather committal to an asylum. At least, none could doubt these conclusions but Stoneburner, and he only fragmentarily. Why Mrs. Corr and Sarah Corr had not risen from their chairs to shut off the jets remained unexplained, unless it was from terror of Mr. Markashian.

After two hours in the echoing house, the police discovered at the foot of the disused maids' stairs what remained of the doctor — Dr. Corr, who had gone West only figuratively, his body having been crammed into a closet, or large cupboard, in that sealed passage. A gas jet was within the cupboard, and the police captain speculated that the old man, still living, had been bound, pushed into the closet, and left for some hours with the gas turned on. He must have been a vigorous old man, Dr. Corr: great strength would have been required to subdue him. Passed from this life for many months, Corr, and that by what must have been an act of explosive violence, the expression of a domestic hate that had smouldered many a year. Markashian, rallying, disclaimed any knowledge of the doctor's death. And so far, but no further, the police believed him.

The police put the livid Markashian upon a sofa in what had been the doctor's office. After a time — he watching the closed door intently all the while — Markashian defiantly told them, his slippery vanity somewhat reviving, that he had gone to the attic to rummage the doctor's desk for a will. "My wife has her rights, after all," and Dr. Corr, presumably never to return from the West, might have left behind a testament of sorts. Stoneburner watched that vulturnine bravado pale and sag, then; but Markashian went on, stumblingly, to say that he had run downstairs in haste and had fallen, and knew nothing of what ensued in the Corr house.

"And why did you hurry on the stairs?" the police captain demanded.

"Because it was coming up, up from behind the books," Markashian cried out, gripping the sofa arm.

"What do you mean?" The captain was infected with this man's dread.

"Oh, it woke. The books falling, the mouth, the white hair, the dusty hands!" That said, Markashian lay sobbing on the floor. From the rim of one high shelf, past the leather spines of fine bindings which gleamed from their cases, a streamer of soot floated downward to settle upon his cheek.

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Take a time traveler into the future and nobody can argue factually about what he finds there; but take him into the known past and your critics can confront you with historical facts. Not that this deters numerous writers (we were recently forced, as reviewers, to read a time-travel novel in which ancient Vikings spoke modern Swedish and knew all about Indian corn); but it's a pleasure to come upon a tale of time travel that knows whereof it speaks — and a double pleasure when it's written as delightfully as Doris Gilbert's first contribution to a fantasy magazine. A firstrate TV writer, Miss Gilbert understands fantasy as well as she understands show business, whether it's Broadway 1952 or Drury Lane 1744 — and that, as you're about to discover, is very well indeed.

The Chocolate Coach

by DORIS GILBERT

June 15, London . . . London, can you imagine!

Aggie darling:

You can see by the above where I am. I mean, if you ever *do* see this letter. Whether you do or not, I've simply got to write to you and tell you what happened to me. If I don't, I'll go out of my mind — stark, staring, gibbering, drooling, completely-off-my-trolley crazy! I've got to talk to somebody and there's nobody to talk to — outside of that old Weird and I don't even know that I want to *speak* to *him*. What I mean is, the people here wouldn't believe me. They just wouldn't. They're liable to put me in Bedlam or something.

It's funny but I haven't a single impulse to unburden myself to Bill. Maybe because there are certain things I just couldn't tell him. I mean if he knew he might blow his top, you know how highstrung he is. Of course, you'll find this all pretty ironic when you hear the whole story. Because even if Bill knew, *what* could he do about it?

Anyway, doll, you're my best friend in the whole world and you've listened to my ravings before, at 3 o'clock in the morning after the tenth pot of coffee or the skaty-eighth scotch and soda. It seems like forever since I wanted to know *why* didn't I get that part, and *why* did I fall in love with a married man, fifteen years older than I am, and *where* am I going to get the money to pay Saks, and *what* has Barbara Bel Geddes that I haven't? It seems like forever that we sat in my apartment and I used to bend your poor,

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tin, patient, crumpled old ear. *So long ago!* Honey, you have no idea how screwed up *that* is, but please bear with me, and excuse my handwriting as I'm sitting here with an old quill pen in my hand. . . .

In London. England, yet.

And you poor thing, you probably think I'm with some broken-down road company of *Oklahoma!* in San Francisco or someplace. God knows what you've been thinking ever since I didn't show up to pick you up for that angel's cocktail party. It isn't my fault I never got there. I started out to pick you up. I honestly and truly did start out.

I have no idea how I'm going to get this to you. I'm sure I couldn't lay my hands on an airmail special delivery in all of Old Blighty. But I have to write to you. I simply have to. It's the ham in me, darling. Aggie, do you realize, I'm sitting here, in a dressing room, after the best performance I ever gave in my life to absolutely thunderous applause (they were frothing in the aisles!) . . . with an old quill pen in my hand?

I must be calm.

Look, sweetie, this is why I didn't call for you that Saturday night. You remember what a foul mood I was in that day, after waiting around all afternoon to see that lousy TV director who only *sees* people on Saturday and then he never showed up and we're all standing around like cattle and Bill calling up and saying he had to go home to Long Island which I know I should have been more sympathetic because Shumlin just threw his play back in his face, but anyway I said I never want to see you again for the four thousandth time (I'm *sure* this happened because I said that although the old Kreep here says it has nothing to do with it) and then you phoned, you darling, and I said I feel stinking so you said they're giving a big party at that angel's, the one who's putting up the money for David Blake's musical, at least they think he's putting it up . . . and they want to dress up the joint with some real glamorous real flesh actresses, so will you?

And I said I would. And you said to dress, so I did. I put on my long white nylon net (very la grecque) and the velvet cloak thing with the hood (I remember distinctly!) and you *know* I picked up the phone and I told you I was going out and grab a cab and to be standing in front of your hotel you know how hard it is to park there. You *know* I told you that.

Well! I went outside and all these things were churning up and down inside of me but I keep trying to fight it down and looking for a reason to feel real gay — you know me and my screwball sense of humor — when I see this chocolate coach standing in the street in front of my apartment house.

You know the one. The *chocolate* coach. It's always clopping around town with the four perfectly matched gray horses and the driver with the lavender livery and ruffles under his chin and the powdered peruke (he looks like

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he was displaced from a Shubert musical) and the coach is painted all lavender and purple and gilt like the box those Picadilly chocolates come in. They use it to deliver candy in. The Picadilly people. You used to kid about it all the time. You said it yourself. How sleek, chic and antique can you get? That was the time we saw it come clopping down Madison Avenue. A couple of years ago . . .

Well, that Saturday night it was standing in front of my house and a couple of taxis did go by but they were loaded, and I thought to myself, what a gag, wouldn't it be wonderful if I picked up Aggie in it and we swanked up, right in front of David Blake's angel's town house? Some joke. I remember standing there, looking at it and thinking what fun it would be and for the moment I wasn't bothered by *one* of my personal tragedies. What was the good of being bothered or caring that I've always wanted to be an actress, ever since I was a kid — a *good* actress — and I've worked and studied hard and tried and the field's overcrowded and I know I'm six for a nickel, but all the same? And Bill, what was the use of beating my chest about that? With us, the timing was all off. We met at the wrong time, that's all . . . too late, not early enough. I honestly wasn't thinking about any of those things, Aggie, not that moment I wasn't — just what a laugh it would be to call for you in the chocolate coach. And that minute, just when I was thinking it and another loaded taxi whizzed by, the driver with the wig on turned and looked down at me and winked.

So I guess I must have winked back. I guess I didn't give a damn *what* happened, because I picked up my trailing nylon draperies — very stately-like, real goddess, you know — and sashayed over to the coach and called up to the coachman, "The Park Sheraton, if you'll be good enough!" He nodded and reached into his sleeve and took out a funny-looking pair of eyeglasses, stuck them on his nose and, just like that, I got in.

And that is why, tonight, I am the rage of London in the Eighteenth Century. This is me, only I'm in London and it's 1744.

Now I had no idea what was happening, as you can well imagine. When I got in the coach I just noticed how beautifully brocaded the upholstery was. I didn't see any boxes of candy but it was the end of the day so it was only natural to think he had made all his deliveries and was on his way back to the barn. I certainly didn't think I *wasn't* in the Picadilly coach, that this was a *real* coach from the Eighteenth Century and the coach and I somehow got loused up in the same time pocket. You know time pocket or slot or something, or whatever it is they call it in the science fiction magazines. Pete Simmons has a television program about it — Time Travel Bobby, I think it is. Actually, according to that mad character here, I am the result of a time-entropy, but you'll have to keep your hair on before I explain

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about *that*. This is one of those deals you have to tell about one thing at a time, the way it happened.

The way it happened is almost as soon as I got in the coach, I remember leaning back, feeling suddenly, awfully pooped, like all the blood was running out of my body and then I heard the flick of a whip and the coach began to move.

There I was being drawn by four perfectly matched gray horses, going east on 65th toward the Park.

Now to get to the point (and I'm still not sure what the point *is*) he started driving right into the Park. In fact, he was right *in* the Park when I came out of this emotional blackout that grabbed hold of me and realized what was happening. He was getting onto the Transverse! I stuck my head out of the window and called up to him on top of that box-thing, "You don't have to go through Central Park to get to the Park Sheraton! The Park Sheraton isn't anywhere *near* Central Park! It's off Sixth Avenue. . . ." But he didn't pay any attention. He kept right on going and into the Underpass. I thought I'd try again in the Underpass — you know how sound travels when you yell in a tunnel.

I kept yelling "The Park Sheraton!" and I remember how hollow and gummy my own voice sounded, like hearing somebody else when you're under water. . . .

Aggie, we didn't come out on upper Fifth Avenue like we were supposed to. We came out on Drury Lane. That's where we came out!

I didn't know it was Drury Lane at the time. I didn't know what the hell it was. I just saw a cobble-stoned street with these quainty little buildings, not many street lamps and oil-ones at that, a couple of sedan chairs, a coach or two and all these people walking up and down. I didn't know what *they* were, at first. Dress extras, I thought. A movie set. They didn't build a movie set right in the middle of Upper Fifth Avenue! I was panicky, Aggie. *Panicky!* I don't drink that much.

I leaned out of the coach and yelled, "Stop this thing! Let me out! Stop it at once!"

You know when I fainted, when I passed right out of the picture? There were a couple of men walking along in knee pants and silk stockings, with buckles on their shoes and silver-top canes — and they *knew* me. I know they knew me because one of them shouted, real fresh, "Hurrah! It's Peg! She's up to it again!" I remember thinking, "How do they know my name?" before I did an el foldo altogether.

When I came to I heard somebody saying, "Loosen her stays. . . ." and somebody else was saying, "She has no stays. She came in her shift. . . ." and I opened my eyes and two girls were bending over me. By the confusion

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and the way there were costumes thrown all over the place, I could tell I was in a dressing room . . . with *candlesticks.*

One of them started rubbing my hands and the other one turned to the coachman from the chocolate coach who was standing in the doorway and said, "There is no reason for your standing about like a stork any longer! Get out, you Peeping Tom!" In fact, she went over, hoisted her hoops and was about to give him a swift kick in the shins, when he stepped aside, looked at her as if she were dirt or something, whipped out those funny eyeglasses again, put them on disdainfully and got out.

Aggie, I thought it was dreaming. It was so much like a dream I didn't even argue with them when they kept shoving smelling-salts under my nose and bathing my temples and calling me Peg beloved and sweet Peg and was I sure I was not too ill to perform. I did ask them "Perform what?" and they went into a snit again. Poor Peg! She's forgot tonight is *The Taming Of The Shrew!* Would she know her part?

What part, I asked them. They told me, whipping the smelling salts even faster and beating a fan at me furiously, *Kate . . . certainly.* Well, of course I know Kate. Of course, I did Bianca at Sarah Lawrence (not even a lead at college) but I knew Kate inside out, I had to listen to it enough. Not that knowing Kate ever helped me later on playing those Saroyan street-walkers or the time I was Tondeleyo in stock.

Feature it! I jolly well *knew* I was dreaming. Here these two girls in hoop skirts and J. Arthur Rank cleavages were putting Kate's costume on me and praying over me like I was something — and dream or no, here was my chance to do some *good* acting again, the kind a born actress dreams about and to make a long story short (wait till you hear the rest of it!) that night I stepped out on the stage of the Drury Lane Theater and did Kate in *Taming* — the whole play, all of it and never blew a line.

They loved me, Aggie. They just loved me. They cheered. They blistered their hands. They forgot to eat their oranges. I was great!

All right. I was willing to settle for a dream. It was a magnificent dream. And two more things happened before it was forced on me that it wasn't a dream. (You see, I hadn't seen the end of the chocolate coachman.) The first thing was I met a young, handsome *unattached* playwright! It seems that after the show (we do a performance here at 6), the cast and I ended up at a place up the street called The Rose Tavern (you wouldn't know, dear, but it's about halfway between the Drury and the Covent Gardens) — a sort of Eighteenth Century Sardi's where I was even given a big, fat buss by Samuel Johnson (either Boswell isn't born yet or he's walking around in rubber pants) and someone brought over this perfectly wonderful-looking guy,

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like Bill sort of, only younger, and said . . . "Mrs. Woffington, may I have the pleasure of introducing an admirer of yours, Mr. Peter Chadwick? He hopes to write a play for you. . . ."

Aggie, they thought I was *Peg Woffington*. They *think* I'm Peg Woffington. The man called me Mrs. Woffington, which reminds me that I should explain, dear. In the Eighteenth Century, Mrs. doesn't mean you're married (with the way things are I'd need *that* like a hole in my head) — it's just what they call all actresses here because maybe if they aren't married they ought to be. I wouldn't know.

I didn't know. I still thought I was dreaming. I was still bowled over from doing Kate and being kissed by Samuel Johnson and meeting an attractive, unattached man, being lifted up and whirled away and having roses thrown at me, so you can understand why I was perfectly willing to go along with the gag and went home (to *her* house) and kicked off my shoes and told Mrs. Woffington's maid (*she* didn't bat an eye when I came in) to bring me a glass of wine.

Don't wake me up, let me dream!

And then the coachman came in. Not even announced. He just walked in as if he owned the place or was at least an uncle or an old friend of the family. At first, I didn't know him. He was dressed quite soberly and he wasn't wearing his wig; quite bald, with a curly, gray fringe but he had on those funny-looking glasses. Kind of oblong, with eight sides, like on the picture of Benjamin Franklin.

Aggie, that was no coachman. Not even on 65th Street. He just got himself up like that to come and get me. He's a real old Weird. He goes under the name of Dr. Leyden — Nathanael Leyden. I don't think it's his right name but who knows? He asked if he might sit down and said, "I deeply apologize. I must ask you to forgive me. Some explanation was owed you before the performance." I remember how he had stood there and ducked the kick in the shins. But I didn't interrupt, I just sat there with my glass of wine and smiled at him and went on (so to speak) with my dream.

"You see," Dr. Leyden said, "you were brought here from the future to take Mrs. Woffington's place — to live her life for her, for the time being, because if Mrs. Woffington stayed here in England during these years she might not live at all. . . ."

I felt like saying "take it from the top of the page," I was so confused but when did a dream ever make any sense, so I let him go on.

"Perhaps I should explain my position in all this," Dr. Leyden said. "You might say, as a man, I am a link between the dark sciences, more often known as sorcery during the Middle Ages, and the logical magic, to be known as science from this age of reason on. . . ."

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It's funny that I remember it now, word for word, but then I always was a quick study. I let him go on talking. He told me that Peg Woffington had come to him for help, being mixed up in some awful trouble (he wouldn't say what it was), serious trouble that she couldn't keep her hands off of, unless her hands were tied for her. I imagined it was a man and from what Dr. Leyden told me about Peg in his curly English she sounded a hell of a lot like me.

In fact, I said so. "She sounds like me," I said.

"She's an actress," Dr. Leyden said. "It became necessary for her to escape into time, but a balance had to be kept. It needed another actress from future time to take her place."

"It sounds like a see-saw," I said.

"Something like that," Dr. Leyden said and pulled the time-entropy business on me.

"An actress who wouldn't be missed," I said it and I said it bitterly. Who in New York was missing me now? Peg Woffington would be missed. Not me, not Peggy Strickling.

Well! I wasn't going to be depressed and sorry for myself even if this great triumphant night was only a result of something I had for lunch.

I stood up. I was grand. "Of course, you know, Dr. Leyden," I told him, kicking the train of my peignoir as I walked, "that I happen to be dreaming you."

"Reasonable," Dr. Leyden said. "Thoroughly reasonable, in the light of now. But untrue, because you will find that time passes, not as time in a dream, but actual time. Count the sunsets as they go by, Madam. Observe each moonrise. *Watch your clock!*"

He went and I did, Aggie. I've been doing it for months. It's been months and months and months and I'm sitting here, in my dressing room at the Drury. In real time. By the clock. Hour for hour. Day for day. Night for night. And week for week. I keep looking at clocks and counting the meals I've had and every morning I check the sunrise. I've been counting them. More often than not, Peter Chadwick counts them with me. Wonderful!

Aggie, I *know* I'm not Peg Woffington. I'm Peggy Strickling. I was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, June 22, 1926. But according to *them*, I'm the great actress, Peg Woffington, the toast of the Drury Lane, the love of the London Theater. Through force of circumstances and being thrown completely on my own (I haven't been able to get hold of Dr. Leyden from that night until this and tonight he *had* to show up!) I've had to let everyone believe I'm the great Peg. I must admit no actress *whatever* has ever had to play a part for months and months and months at a time before she was born and that she doesn't know very much about, being somebody she

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isn't, every minute of the day and night. But what I *want to know is:* If they think I'm Peg Woffington, Peg of old Drury, and I know damn well I'm Peggy Strickling . . . then where did Peg Woffington go to?

Is she back in New York, *being me?*

That old hocus pocus with the big entropy didn't say. If she is, poor kid . . . I bleed for her. What a come-down!

Come to think of it, if she's in New York and it's 1952 and she's being me — you're my best friend, can *you* tell the difference? I wonder how she's making out with Bill?

Why should I worry about her? I've got troubles of my own. Here's the situation on Peter — my darling, adorable Peter Chadwick, that is. I'm worried sick about *him*. He's dreamy, Aggie. You'd adore him. He's just right for me. Brilliant, charming, sexy but a gentleman and full of enthusiasm — like Bill must have been long before I met him. Young and free and full of dreams. Peter's just wonderful, Aggie, and we fell in love right away (or "straight off" as they put it) but I can't marry him. It won't work. I can't do it to him. It would only lead to bloodshed.

For one thing, I don't think he's going to amount to anything and I'm going to be famous until the day I die. It says so in the books. Or it *will* say so. The worst of it is, Aggie, I majored in the drama at school and I never read any plays by an Eighteenth-Century author called Peter Chadwick. He won't have a happy life with me. I know it! No man does with a famous wife. They don't think any more of also-rans or has-beens here than they do where you are. And strictly between us and being crucially honest, I don't think Peter has any more *real* talent than Bill has. The play he wrote for me isn't very good really and I adore him and he's wonderful and so sensitive and I don't know what to do about it. It would hurt him terribly if I don't make them put it on but it will tear him to pieces if Addison or Steele puts it in the *Tatler:* "Mrs. Margaret Woffington appeared last evening at the Drury Lane Theater in *Little For Nothing*, a piece by Mr. Peter Chadwick. Mrs. Woffington strove mightily to bake an airy pastry from such soggy dough as would cause dyspepsia in the bowels of Charlemagne's armor. . . ."

They're always writing things like that. They lacerate you. They're even meaner than Nathan and I just can't do that to poor Peter.

As if that's all I'm going to do to him!

Up until now apparently he's the only innocent in town who doesn't know about Peg Woffington and the Duke. I didn't know about him myself until Dr. Leyden's visit to me just before the performance tonight. What a scandal! This is really juicy. No wonder no one has mentioned it to me before. They were afraid to. They might get their heads chopped off or something.

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Aggie, Peg Woffington not only had to get out of England, she had to get out of the century! The Duchess wanted to kill her. I won't say what Duchess (I'd probably better *burn* this) but I will say that the Duke her husband is awfully close to the throne. If a few people die ahead of him, he's *in!* Now, not only did the Duchess want to kill Peg but the Duke too, and then she was going to throw herself on top of the pile. Well, of course, the Duke didn't feel like being murdered and neither did Peg but they have a terrible effect on each other — big, tragic, important lovers in the Liebestod manner! Can't keep away and all that stuff. So at the time the Duchess wangled it so that the Duke was sent to France on some kind of a mission to get him away from Peg, dear old Dr. Leyden made Peg take a trip in time because she was on the verge of taking one to France.

And that, dear, is where I came in.

Leyden had to tell me this evening. Because the Duke's back.

"And neither wild horses nor the Duchess herself can keep him from coming to you," Leyden said.

Well!

I wanted to know what he wanted *me* to do about it. He said he felt it was relatively simple. *I* wasn't in love with the Duke. Refuse to see him. Pull up the drawbridge. Dust him off. How did *I* know? If Mrs. Woffington and I had so much in common . . .

Dr. Leyden asked me if I wasn't content with my glory in the theater, with my adoring suitor, Mr. Chadwick. Oh, I was, I said, I certainly was. And I loved life? I love it.

Don't see the Duke, he said, in effect.

Peter's calling for me in a little while and we're supposed to go over to a place called The Turk's Head. This young actor David Garrick said he'd meet us there.

A little while ago I sent my dressers home — the two girls that said I was going around in my shift when it was only my white nylon dinner dress.

And now look at me. Sitting here writing to you because I'll go out of my mind if I don't. It's been unbelievably marvelous but I don't know how long I can keep this up. As long as Peg Woffington lives? How long *did* she live anyway? I don't know that much about the history of the theater. . . .

Sweetie, I've got to keep it up. There must be a reason, from *my* standpoint, why I jumped in the chocolate coach and got see-sawed here to balance Peg Woffington. Because, look, darling I've got everything in the world I ever wanted. I'm a great and recognized actress in a time when it's not so hard to be recognized. The theater is young, the field is smaller — there's no Hollywood, no radio, no television. It isn't so big you can get lost in it. The less said about bathroom conveniences the better — or dentists

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or doctors. The people die very young. As a matter of fact, London is a very dirty town — backward in many ways, as you'd expect it to be. But I'm here and I'm Peg Woffington and the talk is so brilliant (the Age of Reason, as Leyden says) and the people are amazing, the ones I know — and I'm in love. I've got Bill only at the right time and not too late . . . of course, as I just told you, that's still a problem. A problem? Aggie, you have *no idea*!

Aggie, when I came back here after the performance there was a jewel-case on my dressing-table that didn't belong there. Inside, was a ring with a crest on it and a piece of note-paper with the same crest and this spidery handwriting. I'll copy it. . . .

"Beloved — From the most unexpected quarter, Destiny Herself has penned the end to our star-crossed tale. The Duchess died this evening of natural causes. Wait for me — for our new, our better, brighter beginning. . . ."

How do you like that? *Now* what am I going to do? I don't even know him. I never even *saw* him! Well, I'd better finish dressing and . . .

Aggie! There's a taxi downstairs. A yellow cab! Just now when I was telling you about this thing with the Duke I heard this horn honking. I couldn't believe my ears so I went to the window and looked out and it's parked in the alley right near the stage door. Wait a minute — I'm so loused up I could imagine anything. I'd better look again. . . .

I looked again. It's there all right, right under the lamp. A real yellow taxi parked right here in the back alley off Drury Lane in the Eighteenth Century where they don't have any yellow taxis! And guess who's driving it, as if you didn't know! Old logical magical see-saw entropy Hootnanny, sitting there with his flag up.

Quick curtain.

Do you think I'll meet her on the stairs? One of us has got to get out of here. There isn't room in London for *two* Woffingtons. What'll she say when Peter walks in? We've got this date with David Garrick and his girl at The Turk's Head. How will she know what to do?

How will *I* know what to do when I get back to New York and TV casting directors and parties for angels and Bill's play God help it and all the old hassle? What's the old Weird gone and done to us both?

Actually, yours, in one hell of a tizzy,

Peg

o

P.S.: I'm being a dope really. She'll know what to do all right. So will I. After all, aren't we both *actresses*? Hell, *we're* the greatest actress of the Age of Reason! You should have seen us as Kate!

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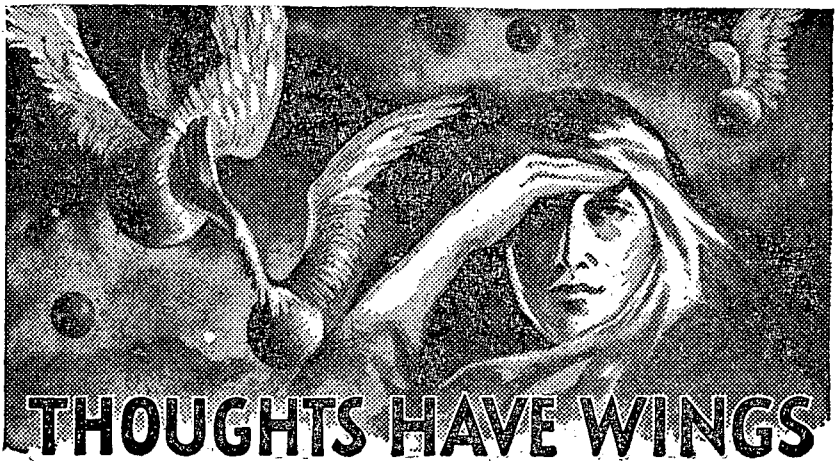

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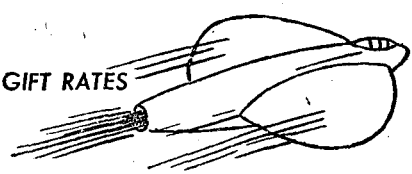

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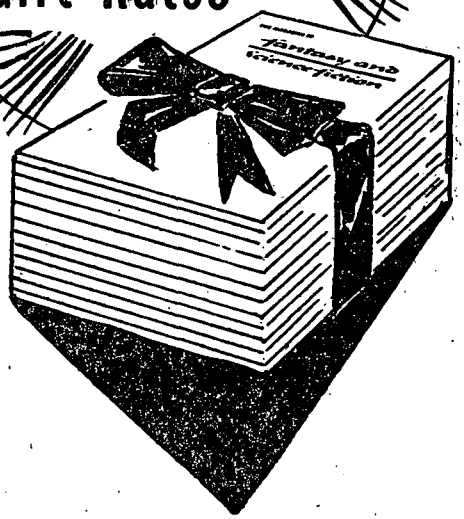

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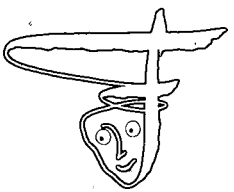

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